



# THE INTERNATIONAL NEWS

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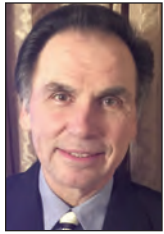
“Put on the whole armor of God”

Spring 2021

## “CHRIST CRUCIFIED!”

*“For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach CHRIST CRUCIFIED, unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). What do you think Paul means by this?*

by Bill Watson



Some years ago I was in Orlando, Florida, visiting the downtown area when I stumbled across a Muslim festival of song, dance, and celebration being held outside in a public park. It was very interesting and quite well done with all of the cultural pomp and colorful outfits exhibited by the people attending to the booths set up for selling items particular to the Muslim lifestyle and culture, and by a stage show that was very artfully done. It was a real gala event!

As I stood there watching and observing, I took the opportunity to engage a woman in conversation. She was fully covered in a black burka from head to toe. However, a man standing on the other side of her interrupted us abruptly. He quickly hijacked my conversation, literally pulling her out of the way, and began to answer the questions I was asking her concerning the festivities.

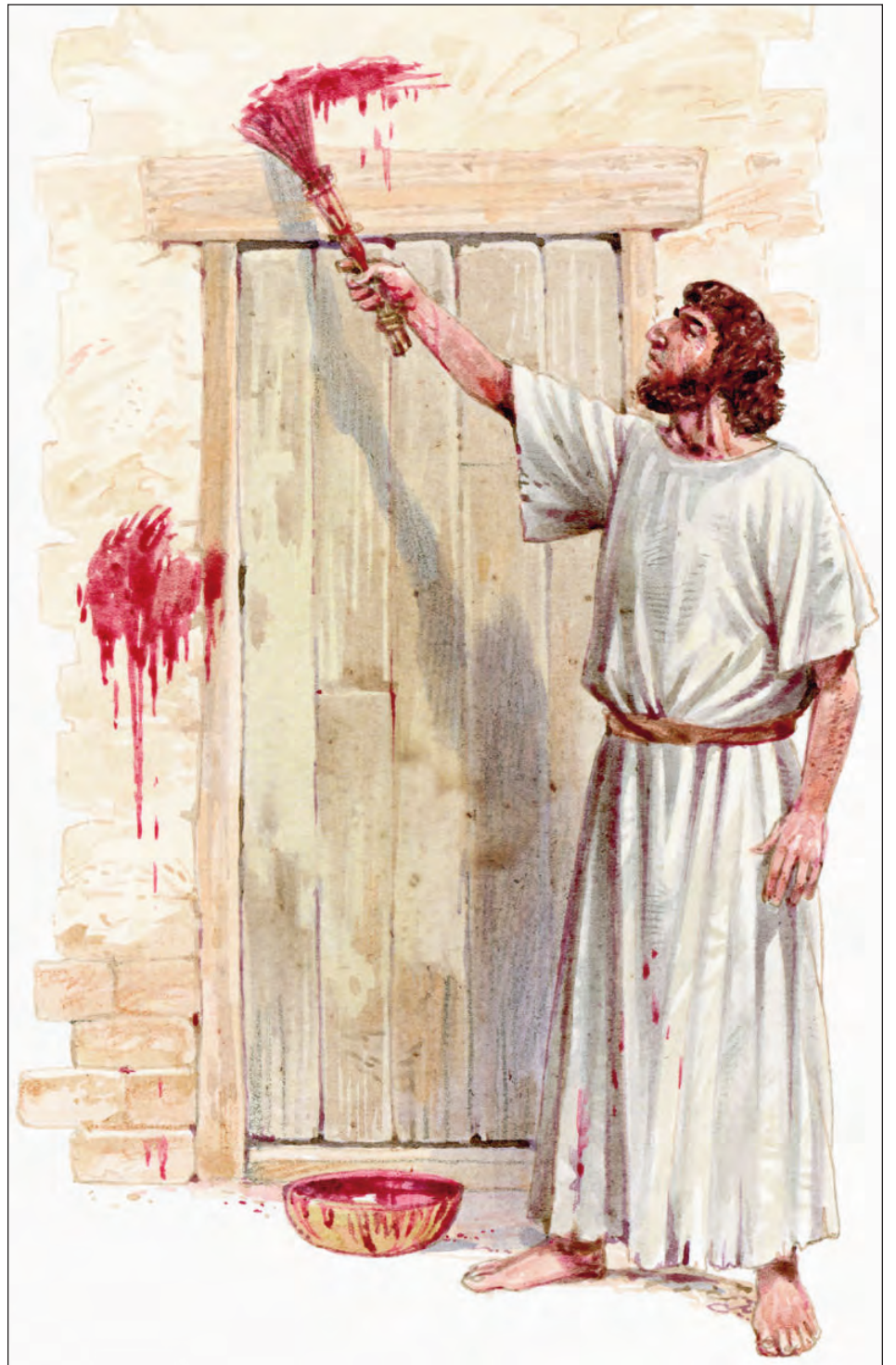
After what appeared to be a rather rude and interrupting introduction, surprisingly we became more comfortable with each other as we walked and talked. So I took this opportunity to discuss many things with this gentleman, who actually turned out to be really colorful and entertaining—we both had quite a good time conversing for well over an hour or so while we walked around the festival.

However, in the course of our discussion, which covered a variety of subjects but primarily centered on culture and religion, he and I came up on a real obstacle for him—*Christ crucified!* It became ever so clear to me that Paul was very accurate when he said, “unto the Jews a stumbling block, and unto the Greeks foolishness.” Though this man was neither, regardless, from his Muslim perspective the concept of *Christ crucified* was indeed, a “foolish stumbling block.”

As our conversation focused on this particular topic, it became apparent that, while he did not believe Jesus Christ was the Son of God, an even greater obstacle for him was the “crazy” idea of how a man could die for another and qualify as an atonement for that person’s sins. As I tried to explain how this works, it made me wonder, just how many Christians might also take this act of “self-sacrifice” our Lord lived, and then marginalize, or maybe completely miss, the deep, rich meaning of “*risk and value*” our *sinless Savior* accomplished?

### What Was the Risk, and What Is the Value?

In Matthew 4:1–11, we find Jesus being led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. Perhaps, we’ll never know just how pivotal this meeting—*this confrontation*—really was, but the “stakes” couldn’t have been any higher. Everything was on the table! Our Lord was facing off with an extremely powerful spirit being—a mighty one—a fallen and rebellious covering Cherub. He at one time was the crowning creature in God’s vast realm—perfect in his ways. When you unpack this Hebrew word for “perfect,” you realize just how much God put into this angelic being. The Hebrew word *tamiym* explains Heylel (Lucifer) was without spot, undefiled, intended to be a light bringer! This angel-



ic being, which was a covering Cherub, was just not some minor player in the realm of God’s kingdom of creatures. He was a *very important creature and servant* of the Most High (Ezekiel 28:13–19; Isaiah 14:12–15).

In addition, this was no small struggle—this was a major Face-to-face conflict, Spirit to spirit, a battle of wills on a broiling level that, frankly, is beyond our grasp to comprehend. And furthermore, Heylel recognized the Spirit of Christ that now was contained in a *mortal tabernacle—a physical body*—because Christ was his creator (Colossians 1:16–17). That’s right, Lucifer was very familiar with who he was confronting!

So, now that he (Satan) was in a much more powerful position at this time, comparably speaking, because the Word was presently mortal (*unlike His preincarnate Self as the Word*) and perceived to be vulnerable, destructible, and subject to elimination, death (Hebrews 2:9–10), this was a real window of opportunity to thwart the plan of the Father. If he could get Christ to capitulate and concede to the temptations he presented, it would disqualify and ruin God’s plan of redemption. It would destroy the means by which the Father intended to repro-

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**CRUCIFIED, continued from page 1**

duce Himself through the sacrifice and atoning blood of the *sinless* and *unblemished* Lamb of God—Jesus Christ—Yeshua.

Now, with this as the backdrop, and knowing what really was framing this *contentious dispute*, perhaps we can begin to appreciate just what really was “going down” and just how intense and jeopardizing this showdown, this encounter, actually was! A battle of wills over a period of 40 days and 40 nights, temptation after temptation, maybe some conversation in-between, but undoubtedly, a very argumentative and quarrelsome time for these two formable associates—the One who created Heylel and, of course, Heylel, the former apex of the Word’s created beings—encountering each other and disputing the plan of God’s reproductive goal—His objective—of offering humanity to become co-heirs with Him (Christ) as sons of God, in God’s Family (Hebrews 2:6–8; Romans 8:14–19)!

Wow!! Can you just imagine how outraged Lucifer was? This one time intended light bringer, who fell from grace (Luke 10:18), and now in complete rebellion, urgently trying to take opportunity to exploit this vulnerable moment and condition the Word is in—a once-in-a-lifetime chance to extinguish the whole plan of salvation, including his very Maker. This was what actually was on the grid. If Christ failed and succumbed to Satan’s temptations, God’s reproductive plan would have been derailed! Many don’t understand or realize the significance of this confrontation. Instead, many believe Christ was predestined to succeed and, consequently, miss the deep, rich understandings of the “do or die” struggle and hotly contested conflicts these two “mighty ones” were locked into. Yes, our Lord was *extremely motivated* and committed to exercise all the strength He could from the Father to assure the plan would not be disrupted and fail!

Notice: “For verily he [Christ] took **not** on him the nature of angels; but he [Christ] took on him the seed of Abraham [*He was human in every sense of the word. He was not angelic, but rather flesh and blood—mortal, subject to death, at this time*]. Wherefore in all things [*in every way*] it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself has suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted” (Hebrews 2:16–18).

This scripture is all about explaining that because He was tempted like us and subjected to death—destructible, mortal in every sense, just like us—that this experience allowed Him to understand our condition, affording Him to be the compassionate, empathetic, and merciful High Priest and Savior He is! And to think *He volunteered* to do this on our behalf so we could have access to becoming a son and co-heir with Him—sharing in everything the Father has given Him—this is such an amazing feat of selflessness and sacrifice, which thankfully resulted in our pathway to become an immortal!

**But How Does It Work?**

Getting through this event and successfully battling this *arch demon* that was intent on destroying Him was no easy task. We understand this by the fact that when it was all over, angels came and ministered to Him once Satan left—yes,

**— 2021 Holy Day Calendar —****New Testament Passover**

March 26, 2021 (Observed at sundown)

**Feast of Unleavened Bread**

March 28 – April 3, 2021

**Pentecost**

May 16, 2021

**Feast of Trumpets**

September 7, 2021

**Day of Atonement**

September 16, 2021

**Feast of Tabernacles**

September 21 – September 27, 2021

**Last Great Day (or Eighth Day)**

September 28, 2021

Holy days are observed beginning sundown the previous evening and end at sundown on the days listed. Passover is observed at sundown on the day listed.



**An artist's depiction of Satan's expulsion from heaven**

He was visited by angels (plural) who nursed Him back to health. They gave Him nourishment and refreshed His physical, mental, and emotional condition. Notice: “Then the devil leaves him, and behold, angels came and ministered unto him” (Matthew 4:11). Clearly, this was a very encouraging time for Christ to have some of these angelic beings—friends of His, spirit beings He knew by

**Open Church Policy**

**The Church of God International is an open church.**

**W**e have many people attending who are new in the faith. Some will not always keep each of God’s laws as they should, and some will not believe everything we teach. We pray that they may be strengthened through the services we render and the examples we set as they come to a closer walk with their God. We request that you be neither judgmental nor base your standard for obedience on what you see your brother do. Christ is our standard, not weak and sinful men. Always remember that you will be judged for what you do, not what others do. Your job is to pray for them, set the right example, and please the Father in all that you do. Ω

**DEADLINE FOR NEXT ISSUE: May 15, 2021**

Submissions may be sent to [vancestinson@cgi.org](mailto:vancestinson@cgi.org)

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name—to come and help Him and spend time with Him! I'm sure it was *spiritually refreshing* and relieving to Christ after such an embittered, entangling, and piercing confrontation with Satan for 40 days and nights!

However, Christ also realized this was just the first step in this three-and-a-half-year-long ministry He was about to embark on. He was also well aware that, ultimately, the journey and climax of His life was going to lead Him into many challenges that were not going to be easy to handle. Clearly, He knew this was just the commencement of the required vigilance He was demanded to maintain! And understand, He was well aware of how exhausting it was going to be at times. But, regardless of the existential circumstances that threatened His life, He was willing to put Himself out there and take up the challenge of *remaining unblemished* throughout the course of His existence as a flesh-and-blood *mortal human being!*

Understand, Christ knew He would have to die and have His blood shed. The thought of that was well ensconced in His mind because He understood the law. Notice: “For the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you upon the altar to make an atonement for your souls: for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11). *Blood is a sacrament to God.* This is why he tells us not to eat and/or drink blood. Notice: “And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers [*non-Israelites*] that sojourn among you, that eats any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul that eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people” (Leviticus 17:15).

So, blood is for the remission of sins, and without the shedding of blood there is no atonement for sin (Hebrews 9:22). It is this fundamental premise that my Muslim acquaintance did not grasp. He had no recognition or acceptance of such a *Providential Law from God.* His mind was closed to this very clear and simple truth that the law, “life for life,” is a law that underscores and is the *foundation for redemption.* But, in this case—the case that God the Father and Christ put together before the foundation of the world and that concerns immortal life as the offering—the event *requires a special life* to qualify as the sacrifice for redemption, and that is a sinless, unblemished life!

My Muslim friend did not understand this. He did not believe Jesus Christ was deity, the Son of the Living God. Nor did he believe that Christ was crucified! These foundational doctrinal tenants were foreign to him. In his mind, God does not have a son, but rather a prophet—Mohammad. And though he accepts Christ as a great man; at best, He is just an envoy of God, a messenger from God, or a prophet; a person known in the Qur'an as “Isa, son of Mary.” This was the stumbling block, the obstacle, that caused his eyes to see this as foolishness and preposterous. It prevented him from making the connection of how God was reproducing Himself and bringing many sons and daughters into immortal life as an actual “born” children of God!

### The Lessons Behind the Sacrificial Laws

Though it may be hard to understand, yet it is true, the premise of “life for life” is at the foundation of the sacrificial system (Deuteronomy 19:18–21). Those of us who have been acclimated to the idea and concept of “life for life” have a more natural affinity toward this teaching. But, those outside of this concept have a difficult time in reconciling it and understanding the mechanics of how it translates into forgiveness of past sins and justification for qualifying for eternal life.

However, down through history, from the Celts and Druids to the Aztecs and Mayans, or reaching back to the Amorites, Canaanites, and ancient Babylonians, sacrificing one's children, women, or warriors and athletes to the gods of Moloch, Isis, or Horus, etc., was culturally acceptable. It was a way of *appeasing the gods!*

But, it was *about appeasement*; to appeal for rain, a good growing season, or to satisfy the gods for something—but not necessarily redemption, or acceptance to the afterlife. This was a foreign idea to most civilizations and cultures. And to become part of a family of deities—well, that was unheard of!

But the God of Israel was different! And though there was an element of appeasement involved with the different sacrifices—such as the Burnt, Meal, Trespass, Peace, and Sin offerings—ultimately, the sacrificial system pointed to Christ, who represented the personification of, or fulfillment of the “sacrificial system” for the purpose of *redeeming*

*mankind* from eternal death! This was an overriding, long-term different objective altogether, and was superior to anything mankind could imagine.

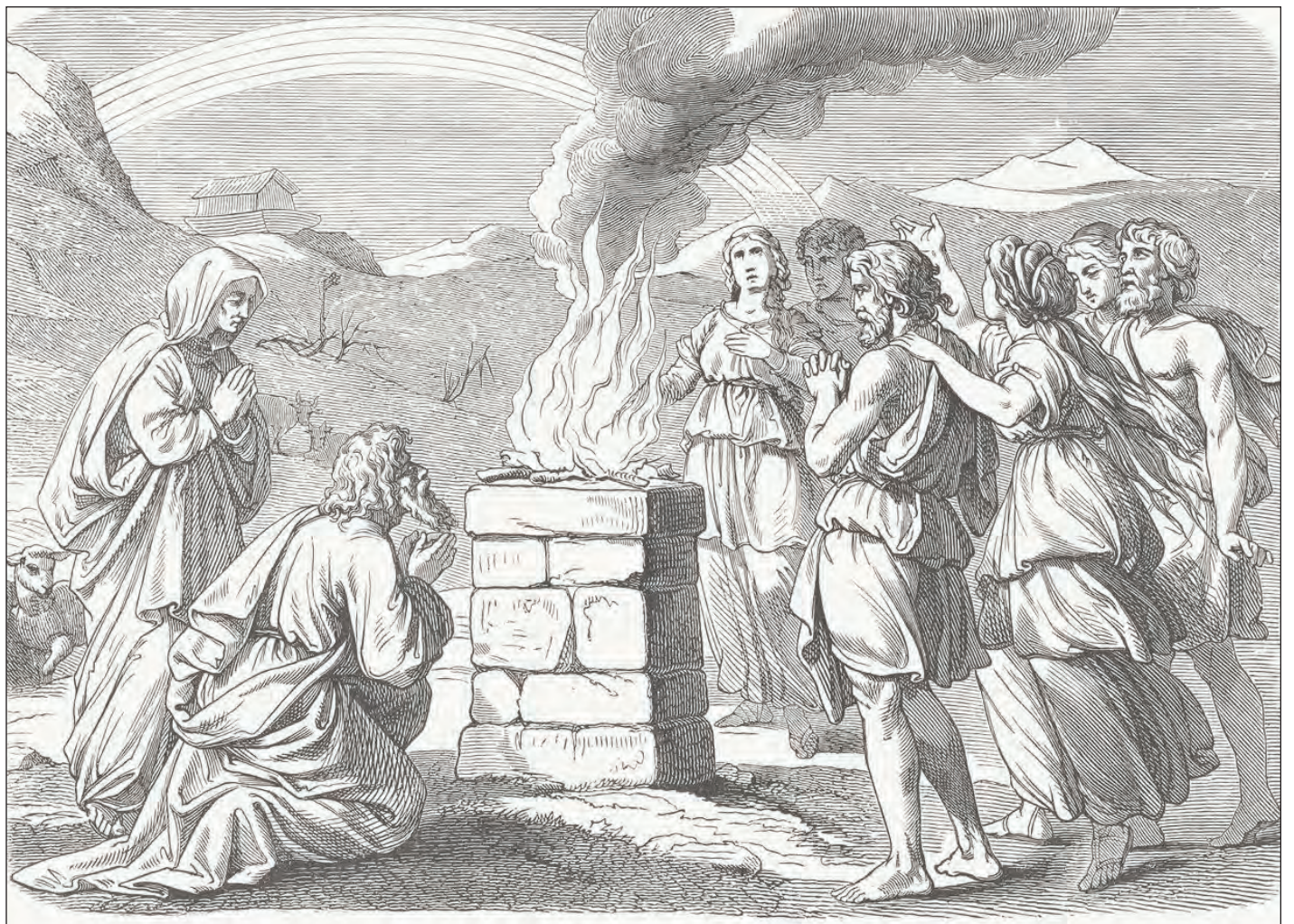
We need to understand, “*Atonement*” was always at the basis of God's sacrificial system. From the beginning, God's plan teaches that we recognize an unblemished lamb was killed and its blood was used as a sign upon the door posts of each home of those that believed the instruction and followed through with doing it (Exodus 12:5–7). This afforded those that obeyed to go on living—*death “passed over” them*—due to the blood; and that was the basis of the lesson. As mentioned before, we must remember *blood is a sacrament* that God considers appropriate to represent the “source of life.” It is representative of the material by which atonement can be justified. “For the life of the flesh is in the blood...for it is the blood that makes an atonement for the soul” (Leviticus 17:11).

When you put it together and consider the pieces of this “redemption process”—such as the shedding of blood from the *unblemished* sacrificial lamb that conciliates and propitiates the person by quelling, or *satisfying the penalty* of the law, which demands death (1 John 3:4; Romans 6:23), then and only then, does it begin to make sense! We need to understand the *real leverage* here is this *unblemished lamb.* Without this “piece” we have no plan, no means by which we can justifiably appease and pay the cost the penalty of the law mandates. The only way to get out from underneath the “death warrant” that is on us is for someone who doesn't need to atone for their own sins (*because they have none; they are unblemished*) to die on our behalf. In other words, though they don't deserve to die (*they are without blame, sinless, free from guilt*), they *willingly choose* to sacrifice their life for us! **This is the awesome act of selflessness that Jesus Christ did for you and me!**

He gave up His immortal life that He enjoyed as the Word of God and divested Himself of all His glory and power and took on the seed of Abraham—*jeopardizing His very eternal existence*—and became human. And He did this so He could die for us, thereby enabling us to avoid having to atone, or pay for our own sins! Notice: “But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels [*He was human, mortal, like us*] for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should *TASTE DEATH* for every man” (Hebrews 2:9). Consequently, He has become the “propitiate” for our sins and the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:1–2).

He did this for each and every one of us so we could avoid the second death, which is the real death being addressed here throughout this article—this second death is *eternal death* (Revelation 20:13–14; 21:8)! But, Jesus Christ constructed for each and every one of us a pathway that allows us to escape the demand of the death penalty because *He paid the cost and fulfilled the requirement* of an *UNBLEMISHED* life that was sacrificed for transgressions committed by others. Wow! What a blessing it is to have this understanding and faith, knowing the truth behind what really was at stake, and the risk and jeopardy involved that was successfully navigated by Christ and the Father, for you and me.

So, “Who has believed our report? And to whom is the arm of the Lord revealed?” (Isaiah 53:1). I hope it is you!



**“Then Noah built an altar to the Lord, and took of every clean animal and of every clean bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.... Then the Lord said in His heart, ‘I will never again curse the ground for man's sake... nor will I again destroy every living thing as I have done’” (Genesis 8:21).**

# How Sin Can Get In: Systematic Desensitization

by W. Adam Boyd



One of the ways sin can take hold of your life is through a process similar to the one underpinning a therapeutic procedure known as “systematic desensitization.”

**Systematic desensitization**, also known as **graduated exposure therapy**, is a type of behavior

therapy developed by South African psychiatrist, Joseph Wolpe. There are three main steps that Wolpe identified to successfully desensitize an individual. First, an anxiety stimulus hierarchy is established. Items that cause anxiety are given a subjective rating in order of severity. If the individual is experiencing great anxiety to many different triggers, each item is dealt with separately. For each trigger, or stimuli, a list is created to rank the events from least anxiety-provoking to the greatest anxiety-provoking.

Next is mechanism-response learning. Relaxation training, such as meditation, is one type of the best coping strategies. Wolpe taught his patients relaxation responses because it is not possible to be both relaxed and anxious at the same time. This is necessary because it provides the patient with a means of controlling their fear, rather than letting it increase to intolerable levels. Another example of relaxation is cognitive reappraisal of imagined outcomes. The therapist might encourage patients to examine what they imagine happening when exposed to the anxiety-inducing stimulus and then allow the client to replace the imagined catastrophic situation with any of the imagined positive outcomes.

The third step is to connect the stimulus to the incompatible response or coping method by counter conditioning. In this step the client completely relaxes and is then presented with the lowest item that was placed on their hierarchy of severity-of-anxiety phobias. When the patient has again reached a state of serenity after being presented with the first stimuli, the second stimuli, which should present a higher level of anxiety, is presented. This will help the patient overcome their phobia. This activity is repeated until all the items of the hierarchy of severity-of-anxiety is completed without inducing any anxiety in the client at all. If at any time during the exercise the coping mechanisms fail or became a failure, or the patient fails to complete the coping mechanism due to severe anxiety, the exercise is then stopped. When the individual is calm, the last stimuli that is presented without inducing anxiety is presented again and the exercise is then continued depending on the patient outcomes.

Now that we understand the essence of this idea, we can imagine that if the powers that be were to utilize certain tactics to spread sin, it could be through psychological means. We have experienced systematic desensitization in regard to many ideologies and beliefs that were once held as criminal, unethical, sinful, and wrong. This concept mirrors incrementalism. Undesirable changes are made in small increments so as not to alarm anyone. They happen over time, so people become numb to them. Through desensitizing people over a long period of time, ideologies can slip in without you even realizing it. You are now relaxed or conditioned to not react in the

same way as you once would. Look at, for example, how the socialism/communism agenda has played out in recent years. It was a crime in this very country decades ago. Now, you have proclaimed American politicians who openly support socialism and even a large movement where many people embrace Marxist ideology. This, too, has been incrementally instilled in our media, and we have been systematically desensitized to it through various means.

An example hierarchy (in order of least anxiety-provoking to greatest anxiety-provoking) of such a construct *could* look like this to people who believe in God: Sunday worship, pagan holidays instead of God’s holy days, fornication, adultery, murder, homosexuality, and belief in God. Of course, we aren’t forming this hierarchy, but some speculate that influential worldly powers have likely formed a hierarchical agenda in order to take God out of the country so that they may claim ultimate power and command reverence for themselves. We know that many have already accepted Sunday worship and pagan holidays long ago when Constantine incorporated pagan traditions into Catholicism. Most people don’t even question it, and if confronted with the truth, they shrug it off because it has become so ingrained in their life they cannot see why they should change, or they do not want to change it. Fornication and adultery are promoted on television as being okay, exciting, and even “normal.” The murder of millions of innocent babies each year is debated, and people fight for a “right” to do this! The belief in God is being taught against and at times ridiculed in higher education in publicly funded universities with your tax dollars. Do you think our country will ever see a day where it will be a crime to even mention Jesus?

Another particularly good example of systematic desensitization is how homosexuality has become increasingly accepted and even celebrated in our country. In our scenario, homosexuality in society is what the stimulus would be. The mass media and Hollywood are routinely introducing gay characters incrementally in attempt to provide some relaxation and reappraisal of that lifestyle. Characters are created to evoke feelings of apathy, compassion, and humanity. The agenda is pushed through mass media as “all about love” and “natural.” We know this to be false. It says plainly in Leviticus 18:22 that “Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination.” Yet, any who speak against this particular lifestyle is now castigated as hateful and discriminatory, and in some arenas rejecting homosexuality is called “hate speech” which is of course incorrectly labeled. God does not produce hate speech. He is all about love (1 John 4:7–21). Christians are unfairly persecuted for speaking out against sin (all sin, not just homosexuality) when the opposing side makes accusations of “hate.” However, we know that all sin is sin, and God loves all people and wants all to come to repentance and choose His will for their lives. It isn’t hateful to say that sin is sin. We are called to teach the Word of God, not a watered-down version of it. We do not hate sinners—we are all sinners. We all fall short of the glory of God. However, it’s imperative we teach

each other about God and His way of life. Many examples of how to approach people and teach about God are in the Bible. None mention a foundation of hate that I have read. That is merely a smear tactic by those who oppose God to control the narrative. The current media system unfortunately has become a machine that pedals hate and discontent. Teaching, informing, and talking with others should never involve hate. It does involve teaching the facts which are according to God’s Word. And guess what? God doesn’t need fact checkers. He is the fact Author and cannot lie (see Numbers 23:19; Titus 1:2; and Hebrews 6:18). Good teachers have many qualities, such as patience, understanding, discipline, love, and compassion. There’s an open exchange of discussion that occurs when learning is taking place. Let’s remember to employ those qualities when discussing the Word with others.

Homosexuality is not seen every day—well it wasn’t seen every day until now on our TVs. In fact, according to a poll in 2016 only about 3 percent of the population in the entire US identified as being L, G, B, or T. In comparison, the same year it was estimated that about 73 percent of the population identified as Christian. Yet, the talking heads present the homosexual lifestyle as being much more prevalent than it really is. Why is that? What makes it so imperative that we all accept that lifestyle? What happens next? Another question one needs to ask is: If the overwhelming majority are Christian, why is God being taken out of everything? Why are Christian characters not integrated into every commercial and television program? Our Ten Commandments memorials are being taken down, prayer is now shunned in most schools, and sometimes the mention of God is barred in many arenas; and often, people are falsely labeled as hate groups all because of their belief in God. Doesn’t make sense, does it? The fact we have to realize is that there’s a hidden force driving these changes. The Bible tells us in Ephesians 6:12 “for we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.”

Let’s look at what it says in Romans 1:26-32:

26 Because of this, God gave them over to shameful lusts. Even their women exchanged natural sexual relations for unnatural ones.

27 In the same way the men also abandoned natural relations with women and were inflamed with lust for one another. Men committed shameful acts with other men, and received in themselves the due penalty for their error.

28 Furthermore, just as they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, so God gave them over to a depraved mind, so that they do what ought not to be done.

29 They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips,

30 slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey their parents;

31 they have no understanding, no fidelity, no love, no mercy.

32 Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them.

Wow! What a powerful excerpt that almost completely describes the times we are living in! There's a multitude of deceived people out there that are promoting and approving ideologies they don't even understand themselves. Don't let yourself be fooled into being one that "approves of those who practice them." Just remember to cling to His Word and build your foundation in Him so that you will not be deceived.

As 1 John 2:15-16 says, "Do not love the world or

the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions—is not from the Father but is from the world."

Graduated exposure and systematic desensitization is going on right now in the United States and in many other countries. The examples depicted aren't perfect and may not coincide perfectly with Dr. Wolpe's original construct of systematic desensitization. However, there are definitely striking similar psychological elements and concepts that are being used in changing our morals, ethics, and values in this world—elements that we should be aware of so that we may stay strong, not lose faith, keep studying, and keep doing God's good work.

Second Timothy 4:3 says, "For the time is coming

when people will not endure sound teaching, but having itching ears they will accumulate for themselves teachers to suit their own passions...."

I think most will agree that we are living in that time. Psychological research has identified that people are more motivated by fear of losing something rather than the possibility of gaining something. Perhaps that is why so many fall into accepting things even though they may not agree with them—they are afraid of what people may think of them, for example.

Some people are becoming afraid of standing up for God in fear of losing their jobs, offending someone, or even being persecuted or castigated. Let us, then, remember, as 2 Timothy 1:7 reads, "For the Spirit God gave us does not make us timid, but gives us power, love and self-discipline."

# Qualified To Rule

by George Roper



When it comes to governance, there are conventional criteria that those in positions of power must fit to be deemed suitable to hold office. There is a tacit expectation that qualified leaders would hold a relevant degree of experience. Some would advocate

that an ideal candidate would be most desirable with a pedigree that is unorthodox, the rationale being that one from outside of the mainstream establishment would be most objective. Others, however, believe that affiliation with a long-standing, reputable institution is essential. Such seats of power are often expected to be filled by those that will carry a degree of dignity. From democracy to dictatorships, how individuals are appointed to office is contingent on the form of government that is in effect. Nevertheless, human protocols often fail to highlight the most important prerequisites to leading any republic or regime.

The prevailing notion of a sovereign leader is one who is imbued with gravitas, status, and influence. It is commonly regarded that such a high-powered, elite individual would operate in prestigious circles and grand surroundings, befitting of their preeminence. Customarily, a monarch's or high-level statesman's pedigree would stem from prominent stock. However, God's rationale in selecting individuals for service operates by different criteria. Paul reflected on how God composed the congregations of the first-century church, which is reflective of how God has worked with mankind overall. God intentionally chose individuals for service that were not in the upper echelons of society. Paul surmised,

"For God's 'nonsense' is wiser than humanity's 'wisdom.'

"And God's 'weakness' is stronger than humanity's 'strength.' Just look at yourselves, brothers—look at those whom God has called! Not many of you are wise by the world's standards, not many wield power or boast noble birth. But God chose what the world considers nonsense in order to shame the wise; God chose what the world considers weak in order to shame the strong; and God chose what the world looks down on as common or regards as nothing in order to bring to nothing what the world considers important; so that no one should boast before

God" (1 Corinthians 1:25-29, Complete Jewish Bible).

Throughout His dealings with mankind, God has drafted a contingent of followers who did not have the wherewithal on their own to achieve the aspirations that God had put before them, apart from God's aid. God has deliberately taken this approach by design as an example and to assure that all understand our inadequacy apart from God. God's approach in working with man demonstrates that man needs to rely on God and that he cannot rely on his own ingenuity. It is through this understanding that one gains the qualifications necessary to govern. One example of this is seen in the manner in which God selected the first King of Israel.

Prior to the monarchy being established in Israel, God channeled civil administration and military operations through delegates that would emerge over the years called judges. During the time of Samuel, the final judge, God relented to the persistent lobbying of the Israelites for a king. When God did decide to appoint a king, did He select from the most influential families of Israel? Did He choose from the most dominant institutions of the land? Did He appoint from the wealthiest, the noblest, the most prestigious of the populace? No, He did not. God chose from the very least.

God selected Saul of the tribe of Benjamin to be the first king of Israel. The nation of Israel was composed of twelve tribes or governmental states. The tribe of Benjamin had an ill repute and was infamously the least of all the tribes. Years before Saul's appointment, in the geographical state of Benjamin, a heinous crime took place that sparked outrage throughout the nation of Israel (Judges 19:1-21:25). The other eleven tribes or governmental states of Israel condemned what occurred. The tribe of Benjamin was pressed to have the perpetrators of said occurrence federally prosecuted. The governance of Benjamin objected. As talks broke down, the failed diplomacy sparked a civil war, which consisted of a confederation of the eleven tribes of Israel against the tribe of Benjamin. The unrest resulted in enormous casualties on both sides with the tribe of Benjamin nearly being wiped out.

Saul had ignominious roots. He hailed from the very same town, in the geographical state of Benjamin, in which the atrocity that provoked a civil

war occurred. As time went on, the town that Saul was from was notoriously associated with all that had transpired. Saul's consciousness of his societal position is reflected in his response to the warm reception that he received upon first meeting Samuel, who served as Judge over Israel.

"And Saul answered and said, 'Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then do you speak like this to me?'" (1 Samuel 9:21, New Living Translation).

Saul acknowledged that in the hierarchy of his day, he was the lowest on the social ladder. Yet God chose him as the first king of Israel. This is indicative of how God professes that the standings of a man are not the most vital. Rather, what is of most importance is a humble mindset that will be responsive to God. Although Saul was the beneficiary of God's appointment, later in his tenure as king of Israel, Saul failed to obey God as he ought.

Over the centuries, God has called to duty those that were not the most prominent in their societal establishments. Those whom God has worked with have been cognizant of a fundamental lack and the need for dependence on God. This consciousness is humility. The rationale of a humble mindset seeks to be responsive to God. God acknowledges, these are the individuals that he recognizes.

"These are the ones I look on with favor: those who are humble and contrite in spirit, and who tremble at my word" (Isaiah 66:2d, New International Version).

Another example of how God impresses what qualities make one suitable to govern is seen in how God the Father worked with Christ. Christ, throughout His life, exemplified the humility that we are to internalize. He exhibited it from the very start of God's plan being set into motion. Paul, in his writings, stressed the importance of copying Christ.

You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

Though he was God,  
he did not think of equality with God  
as something to cling to.

Instead, he gave up his divine privileges;

**Continued next page**

**Continued from page 5**

he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:5–11, NLT).

Christ, as the Word, prior to becoming a mortal man, was not so consumed with His status that He would be unwilling to part with His divine privileges to save mankind. In so doing, He took on a role that was subservient, displaying another iteration of humility. He was born as a mortal man, not in the most grandeur of places but in the most insignificant of locales.

“O Bethlehem Ephrathah, tiniest of townships in all Judah, out of you a king shall come to govern Israel, one whose origin is of old, of long descent” (Micah 5:2, Moffatt).

He resided in Nazareth, an area that, judging by Nathan's reaction, was not deemed to personify regality in a region that could possibly yield the Messiah.

“Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, ‘We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.’

“‘Nazareth!’ exclaimed Nathanael. ‘Can anything good come from Nazareth?’” (John 1:45–46b, New

Living Translation).

Even though He came from divinity, the traits emphasized in His life were not the traits that we customarily would attach to majesty. His life did not underscore status, material wealth, political posturing, or high society. Instead, His life directed observers to emulate the humility that He exhibited and His willingness to respond to God.

As the followers of Christ, we are to recognize the humility that Christ displayed and imitate Him (Ephesians 5:1). As we perform the tasks of our lives, we are to do so with a humble mindset—a mindset that recognizes our limitations and our need for God. Humility is indeed a mindset. It is not a “lower tax bracket.” It is not arrived at simply by being pious, forlorn, or demur. Humility is not the lack of means. Rather, it is placing confidence in God as opposed to the means. Humility is recognizing the inadequacy of our abilities, our finances, our status, our possessions, and our achievements to complete us; instead, it is placing the need to depend on God in the forefront. As Christ, in His humble mindset, divested Himself of divinity and assumed life as a man to serve mankind, so we are to imitate His behavior. In addressing the qualifications that make one qualified to rule, Christ drew a contrast between the rulers of the world and what He expects from us.

“But Jesus called the disciples and said, ‘You know that the rulers of the unbelievers lord it over them and their superiors act like tyrants over them. That's not the way it should be among you. Instead, whoever wants to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first among you must be your slave. That's the way it is with the Son of Man. He did not come to be served, but to serve and to give his life as a ransom for many people’” (Matthew 20:25–28, International Standard Version).

We, too, must forsake our own promotions and instead seek to contribute to the betterment of others.

As we look at the turbulent political landscape of our own day, we find the qualifications that the aristocracy of the world conforms to are not the same qualities that God seeks in us.

In speaking to the people of his day, Christ outlines the qualifications that those that will rule with Him will possess:

Blessed are the poor in spirit,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
Blessed are those who mourn,  
for they will be comforted.  
Blessed are the meek,  
or they will inherit the earth.  
Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness,  
for they will be filled.  
Blessed are the merciful,  
for they will be shown mercy.  
Blessed are the pure in heart,  
for they will see God.  
Blessed are the peacemakers,  
for they will be called children of God.  
Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness,  
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3–10, NIV).

Possessing the character of God is the benchmark for every individual. A humble mindset and a willingness to follow God is essential to being an effective, compassionate and empathetic leader. It indeed is the component that the rulers and legislators of the world lack. Through the examples of the Bible, God conveys the need to assume this mentality in order to truly be qualified to rule.

# Who Preaches the Gospel?

by George Ramocan

Few persons are aware that God has entrusted the preaching of the gospel exclusively to a people He calls **the saints**. There is no other authority on earth for preaching the gospel.

In speaking of the custodial responsibility to preserve, defend, and preach the gospel, the apostle Jude says, “*I...urge you to contend for the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints*” (Jude 3). “The faith” here is synonymous with “the gospel.” In Acts 6:7, when the gospel was being preached throughout Jerusalem, Luke says, “*a large number of priests became obedient to the faith.*” Similarly, in speaking of the preaching of the gospel, Jesus said in Mark 16:6, “*Whoever believes....*” So, to “obey the faith” is to “believe the gospel.”

“Entrusted” speaks to the responsibility of the saints to protect, promote, and defend the gospel. Hence, Paul commands Timothy to “*entrust to reliable men*” the things he (Paul) taught so that they also would “*be able to teach others*” (2 Timothy 2:2).

## So, Who are the Saints?

The saints are “*those who keep the commandments of God and have the Spirit of Jesus Christ*” (Revelation 12:17). Non-commandment-keepers are not saints. Non-commandment-keepers are not entrusted with the gospel; therefore, non-commandment-keepers are not enabled to preach the gospel.

The gospel is given exclusively to a peculiar people called the saints. First Peter 2:9 tells us that the

saints are “*a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him....*”

Consider this:

- The gospel came down to us through, the prophets of God—a commandment-keeping, Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping people (Romans 1:2).

- The great commission to preach the gospel was given to twelve commandment-keeping, Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping men.

- Paul, the apostle assigned by Christ to take the gospel to the gentiles, was a commandment-keeping, Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping man.

- The 120 believers who were empowered by the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost to be witnesses for Christ were a commandment-keeping, Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping people (Acts 2).

- Israel was called to be a light to the nations, and salvation is of the Jews.

On what basis therefore can one claim that the gospel is preached by non-Sabbath-keeping, non-holiday-keeping ministers? Where in Scripture do we find support for this view?

## Gospel Preached Exclusively by the Saints

Colossians 1:27 says, “*To them [THE SAINTS] God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.*”

Second Corinthians 5:19–20 tells us that the saints are the only people in the earth through whom God is making His appeal to all of mankind: “*And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us.*”

## Does preaching the gospel require us to preach about the Sabbath and feast days?

God has designed the preaching of the gospel in such a manner that those who hear it also become aware of His requirements to keep His Sabbath and feast days. How so?

- Second Thessalonians 3:7 tells us that those who are called into the Church *follow our example*. And so they too become *a model to all the believers*.

- Philippians 4:9 says those who come into the Church are instructed to *put into practice whatever they have learned or received or heard, or see in us*.

- First Thessalonians 1:6: *You became imitators of us and the Lord, for you welcomed the message....*

The lesson here is that people who hear the gospel from Sunday-keepers follow the example of keeping Sunday, Easter, and Christmas. They put into practice whatever they have learned, heard, or seen in the leaders of the Sunday churches and become imitators of them and their message.

On the other hand, people who hear the gospel from the Church of God will imitate the beliefs and practices of the Church of God. There is therefore no need to preach about the Sabbath and feast days. In our day,

however, because the gospel people hear is predominantly that preached by Sunday churches, when they come in touch with us they often ask us why we observe the Sabbath and feast days because in our Sunday-keeping culture this is strange to them. Not so in the first century when the gospel was preached predominantly by Sabbath- and feast-keepers.

According to the Scriptures the gospel preached by non-commandment-keepers is another gospel. This lawless gospel does not lead one to repentance of sin and does not qualify one for baptism. This is not the gospel one must hear and believe to be saved.

### So Are the People in Sunday Churches Christians?

Many persons in Sunday churches are predestined to be called. God has predestined them from the foundation of the earth to be called. At the right time, God will call them out of these churches. When they hear His voice, they will come out from among them, repent, and be baptized.

Jesus says in John 10:16: “*other sheep I have which are not of this fold; them also I must bring, and they will hear My voice; and there will be one flock and one shepherd.*”

“*Other sheep I have which are not of this fold* [this is a reference to those ordained by God to eternal life but are not yet called; *they are not yet members of the church*] *them also I must bring* [they are not yet in the church; I must bring them, I must call them out of Babylon], *and they will hear My voice* [when they are called they will hear His voice and will believe the gospel]; *and there will be one flock and one shepherd* [they will then be included in the church under Christ Jesus].”

From the foundation of the earth, God predestined those He will call into His church. When they hear His voice, they will come out of Babylon into the fold of God.

Second Corinthians 6:17: “*Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you.*”

### Summary

There is no other body in the earth except this Sabbath-keeping, feast-keeping Church of God that is given the gospel and the authority to preach it. Consequently, no one can hear the gospel preached and be saved except through the Church of God.

When we speak of the Church of God we do not speak simply of the Church of God International, the United Church of God, and the many others that came out of the Worldwide Church of God. When we speak of the Church of God we refer to the many other people God has called on the earth, many groups like us whom we have never met, but who believe the same essentials of the faith we believe. They do not necessarily belong to any labeled or named corporate body.

The failure to appreciate this truth has caused many to fall for the erroneous view that one can hear the gospel and be saved outside of the Church of God.

## Questions & Answers

by Vance A. Stinson

### Could dinosaur bones have lasted for 65-million years?

**QUESTION:** I have something to say that's bothered me at times over the years.... [B]efore the earth was renewed and made livable...there couldn't have been any life...[because] there was no oxygen and air, which is essential to all life, even sea-life; our atmosphere (or the first heaven) was yet to be created. So what bothers me is that even a lot of Bible-believing Christians buy into this theory that dinosaurs [were] around a million years, some say 65 million years. This is laughable. Dinosaurs had to be created when man was created.... Another thing that's absurd about dinosaurs being 65 million years old is that bones [that old] would [not] even exist. I don't know if they are made of different material than animal or human bones, but I do know animal or human bones won't be around too long when they are exposed to the elements—sun, heat, cold, rain, sleet, snow, wind, insects, scavengers... What do you think, ten, twenty, fifty, one hundred years? We're supposed to believe dinosaur bones are millions of years old? I don't think so.... Let me know what you think.”

P.G., Mt. Sterling, IL

**ANSWER:** I agree that dinosaur bones could not have endured the extreme elements, insects, microbes, and scavengers for 65-million years. The “bones” you refer to are *not the actual bones* of the creatures who roamed the earth those many ages ago, but are *exact copies* of the bones those creatures left

behind—they're *fossils*. Let me explain...

The carcasses of most ancient creatures have completely perished, but the bones of some of them became fossils. Fossilization occurred after the bodies of ancient animals were buried in sediments such as sand or silt. The soft tissues—skin, muscles, organs, etc.—perished quickly, but the bones remained much longer, as the sediment they were buried in protected them from the usual process of rotting. Then, over very long periods of time, mineral-rich water from nearby rocks surrounded these well-preserved bones, and minerals from the water gradually replaced the organic tissue in the bones, eventually producing *solid rock copies* of the bones of the original creatures. So the “bones” we see in museums are not bones at all.

Now, concerning your comments about air and oxygen not existing before God created an atmosphere suitable for human and animal life, I believe a closer look at the text will indicate that both air and the chemical element oxygen existed before God began speaking.

Genesis 1:2 tells us that, before God brought forth light, “darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind [*ruach*: wind, breath, spirit] from God swept over the face of the waters” (NRSV). Before God utters the first command (“Let there be light!”) there is darkness, water, and a wind from God moving over the waters. Assuming the translation of *ruach* as “wind” to be correct, we conclude that air existed before God spoke the first command. (See Genesis 8:1, where the same term, *ruach*, is translated “wind.”)

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Further, since we know that a water molecule is composed of two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom, we conclude that the chemical element oxygen existed not only in the wind from God but also in the

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water over which the wind moved.

The account does not say so, but it is possible that the dark “water-world” condition described in Genesis 1:2 existed because of some kind of cataclysmic event (or series of events) that occurred at some point before—perhaps thousands or even millions of years before—the divine activity described in verses 3–31. In fact, it is possible that the planet had gone through multiple phases over vast ages and had been the home of a very wide range of life forms; we simply don’t know, for the Bible does not say. I do believe, however, that the Genesis account itself, taken just as it is written, does not rule out the possibility that dinosaurs and thousands of other life forms existed on our planet millions of years before the arrival of humans. I also believe it is possibly true that some of the animals scientists have labeled

“dinosaurs” or “prehistoric” did exist—and perhaps still do—alongside humans.

#### Churches outside Asia?

**QUESTION:** Revelation 2 discusses the messengers or angels of seven churches in Asia. What about churches not in Asia?

*C.L. (sent by email)*

**ANSWER:** The book of Revelation was “to the seven churches which are in Asia” (1:4), and those seven churches are named in 1:11. Similarly, the book of Romans was addressed “to all who are in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints” (Romans 1:7), and 1 and 2 Corinthians was to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1 Corinthians 1:2; 2 Corinthians 1:1). While books to the Roman and Corinthian

believers addressed specific issues that members of these churches were dealing with at the time, these books were copied, shared, and preserved by early Christians because they recognized that the local problems were addressed in the light of universal truth—so all followers of Jesus can learn from them.

The same is true of the book of Revelation. The letters (mini-epistles) to the seven churches address issues specifically relevant to those churches at that time, but, like other New Testament epistles, the exhortations and admonitions found in the seven letters have universal truths within them and address concerns that affect believers the world over. The mini-epistles—along with the entire book—carry powerful lessons for all believers of all times. That’s why each mini-epistle urges, “He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches.”

## In Loving Memory

### Linda Foster

October 22, 1956 – January 16, 2021

Linda Foster, 64, of Gladewater, Texas, went peacefully to her rest on January 16, 2021. Linda’s husband Morris and daughter Tiffany were at her side at Morris and Linda’s home.

Linda was born Linda Cheryl Brantley on October 22, 1956. Her parents were Enoch Madison Clayton and Iva Brantley from Lawrenceburg, TN. Linda was born and raised in the Big Sandy, Texas area.

Linda Brantley and Morris Foster grew to love one another and were married in Longview, Texas on February 10, 1974. Morris and Linda were blessed with a wonderful daughter, Tiffany, born in 1979, and a wonderful son, Christopher, born in 1981.

Linda was always a treasured and dedicated wife, homemaker, mother, and friend. She loved her husband, children, grandchildren, and the many, many true friends she and Morris were so blessed with. Linda was a partner in designing and decorating their dream home 25 years ago. She loved to garden, keep chickens, study about healthy living, and entertain Supper Club and many others in their home. From a young age, Linda always loved to sing. She was a lead singer in a local band made up of close friends, playing at the barn



dances, luaus, and various events Morris and Linda hosted. Linda also kept the books for their businesses, Foster Construction and Foster Properties.

Linda is survived by her husband Morris Foster; daughter Tiffany Christianson (husband Dustin); son Christopher Foster (wife Holly); and three grandchildren, Brody Foster, Ben Christianson, and Addison Christianson. She is also survived by her much loved stepmother Carol June Clayton and brother Jerry Clayton. Also surviving are three sisters.

Linda was preceded in death by her dear, much beloved father, E. M. Clayton, sister Judy Clayton, and her mother, Iva Brantley. Linda is a saint for the loving way she cared for her mother for over three years in Morris and Linda’s home until her mother’s death four years ago.

Linda was such a blessing to so many. She was a true gem and treasure. She will be greatly missed by all. We greatly look forward to Linda being called forth from the grave upon the return of her Savior, Jesus Christ.

Though all of us prayed for Linda’s healing and would have loved for it to happen in this time, but we know our loving Heavenly Father chose to heal her according to His perfect plan and in His perfect timing. We trust in Him.

## Jeannette (Crespo) Flecha

May 13, 1971 – December 13, 2020

Funeral services for Jeannette Flecha, 49, of Tyler, were Sunday, December 20, 2020 at Chandler Memorial Funeral Home with Pastor Bill Cooper officiating. Interment followed at Chandler Memorial Cemetery.

Jeannette passed away December 13, 2020 in Tyler. She was preceded in death by her husband, Eliel Flecha Cruz.

Survivors include parents, Nelson and Abigail Crespo of Tyler; children, Jenissa Arroyo and husband Danny of Grand Junction, Colorado, Eliel Flecha, Jr. of Tyler; sisters, Abigail “Tata” Crespo II of Tyler, Nancy Crespo-Shackelford of Tyler; grandchildren, Daniel Isaac Arroyo of Grand Junction, Colorado, Viviana Arroyo of Grand Junction, Colorado; and numerous nieces and nephews.

Jeannette (Crespo) Flecha was born May 13, 1971 in Vineland, New Jersey, the daughter of Nelson Crespo and Abigail (Cintron) Crespo. Jeannie, as she was endearingly known to her family and friends, was the eldest of three children. She grew up in Cleveland, Ohio and soon after moved to Tyler,



Texas, where she met Eliel Flecha, the love of her life. They married on May 13, 1989, and went on to

have two children, Jenissa and Eliel, Jr. Jeannie was a loving and selfless mother, daughter, sister, grandmother, aunt and friend. She always had time for her family, was constant in her willingness to help those in need, and was accepting of everyone. Her home had a revolving door where you were welcome with a good cup of coffee and a warm embrace. Her aura was nurturing, and to be around her was to feel at peace and protected.

Jeannie’s family will always remember her apple-themed kitchen decor, how she loved a good purse, and of course her dog, Tiny, that never left her side. She loved listening to music and watching oldies on the weekends.

Jeannie attended Gospel Lighthouse Church in Tyler and worked for the Church of God International in Tyler. She was a ray of sunshine who brightened everyone’s day. She enjoyed most of all spending time with her son and traveling to Colorado to visit her daughter and grandchildren. Jeannie was a genuine soul who was faithful in prayer and loved the Lord.



# No Compromises

by Michelle Yvonne L. Algarra



**T**True Christians have a tremendous obligation towards God for being called and chosen. God requires commitment and total or one hundred percent obedience to His commandments, statutes, and judgments, with the aim of achieving perfection. Because of the inherent difficulty in defeating human nature and refusing to collude with the ways of this world and the temptations of Satan, Christians sometimes succumb to tendencies to compromise, trying to justify so-called “little sins” as inconsequential compared to the more serious ones people outside the church usually commit.

But there really is no such thing as a little sin or a big sin. There is only sin, defined in the Bible as “the transgression of God’s law” (1 John 3:4). Harboring evil thoughts in one’s mind is even equated as the same as committing them in one’s actions, even if one never has acted on such thoughts. Breaking even just one of God’s commandments is tantamount to breaking all of them.

The paramount danger in learning to compromise or find an easy, haphazard path to obedience is that it may lead to even greater sins or more compromise, which becomes habitual and a part of one’s personality. An example is in being adamant when it comes to the food laws, never partaking even of foods contaminated with unclean, even when severely tempted or forced to do so by unbelievers. When it comes to moral issues, straying away from the ways of this unclean world, even at the risk of persecution and personal hardship, becomes a goal that seems too lofty to attain.

Even just one single sin already disqualifies one from eternal life, for which reason only the sacrifice of the Lord Jesus Christ on the cross is the means to obtain expiation and forgiveness. Jesus Christ was the only perfect human being who ever lived, never committed a single sin or mistake, and He was able to achieve this perfection because He is God.

Human society has become a cesspool, or quagmire of sin, and learning to live a life contrary to the ways of this world with a standard of righteousness far above espoused ideals, must become the goal of Christian living. All other goals—such as goals pertaining to work, education, personal interests, and so on—become merely secondary. Because the goal of character development becomes of utmost significance, major and minor crosses only become temporary setbacks that do not deter one from pursuing the main goal.

Wishy-washy obedience is not acceptable in God’s sight, and constantly comparing one’s self with others who have committed even worse sins will lead one to an attitude of superiority and self-righteousness. Christians are just forgiven, not perfect.

In order to deal with the problem of compromise, it is important to learn to try to focus on God at all times, even in the most trying moments. One must partake of the usual diet of prayer, Bible study, occasional fasting, and meditation. Personal growth may be sustained if it is parallel with required Christian overcoming.

God can answer all prayers, and He can, most especially, grant a Christian his or her desire for productivity, striving hard to be obedient at all times. The overwhelming desire to be in God’s Kingdom makes one willing to change with the goal of perfection everyone desires.

Romans 12:2: “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind that ye may prove what is that good, and

acceptable, and perfect will of God.”

Romans 6:13–14: “Neither yield ye your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin: but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God. For sin shall not have dominion over you: for ye are not under the law, but under grace.”

Romans 3:23: “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God.”

Matthew 5:18–20: “For verily I say unto you, till heaven and earth pass, one jot or one tittle shall in no wise pass from the law, till all be fulfilled. Whosoever therefore shall break one of these least commandments, and shall teach men so, he shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven: but whosoever shall do and teach them, the same shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven: For I say unto, that except your righteousness shall exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, ye shall in no case enter into the kingdom of heaven.”

## Counsel for Parents In the Internet Age

by Michelle Algarra

**O**ne of the main problems confronted by Christian parents in this modern age is how to raise wholesome kids, especially with the rise of the internet and the use of the computer and other gadgets at our disposal.

Parents should raise kids in a God-centered home with Christian worship activities and the Bible as the manual for living. The objective of teaching should be morality versus popular culture, and this requires inculcating proper God-centered values and a good understanding of God’s commandments, or laws.

Children, teenagers especially, are unique individuals possessing their own free will. And the rising tide of permissiveness among peer groups and the various avenues of media are overwhelming pressures to conform to Satan’s culture rather than biblical norms. To be evil has been equated with popular culture.

Parents must strive hard to protect their children from the onslaught of wrong influences that may be gained from the internet, TV, movies, video games, and music by teaching them to make right choices. Through proper parental discipline and upbringing, children may be taught character development by making right choices and avoid the consequences and repercussions that result from mistakes and sinful behaviour.

The problem is, even Bible-based movies sometimes contain scenes of fornication and immorality, violence and murder. Wrong concepts about Jesus’ personality and Bible stories and teachings are usually propagated along with a mixture of truth. And sometimes, even high quality films that depict the realities of war and suffering and the holocaust or persecution of the Jews have an R-rating, with scenes that are offensive and shock the senses.

A mature mind and psychological stability are important factors to be taken into consideration in this area of concern. Parents need to pray to God persistently for guidance in bringing up their children properly and setting good examples themselves as upright Christians.

Also, standards for very young children differ from more mature ones. However, biblical norms should always prevail.

Suggested Reading: *Plugged-in Parenting: How to Raise Media-Savvy Kids With Love, not War* by Bob Waliszewski

Scriptural Reference: “Train up a child in the way

that he should go, and when he is old he shall not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6).

## Some Pertinent Facts About Unclean Seafood

by Michelle Algarra

**A** doctoral dissertation entitled, “Vibrio Parahaemolyticus V. cholerae and V. vulnificus in Norway, with special attention to V. Parahaemolyticus” studies the effects of unclean seafood on health.

The back cover commentary states the following: “The presence of potentially pathogenic vibrio spp. (v. para haemolyticus, v. cholerae and v. vulnificus) was investigated in Norwegian seafood and water samples. All three species were detected in blue mussels (*mythus eduus*) and seawater, but almost exclusively during summer months and from the southern coast. Pathogenicity was examined with respect to known virulence factors, and solely trh (TDH-related hemolysin) was detected.... The genetic typing experiments also revealed a presumptive and so far unique genetic relationship between pathogenic and non-pathogenic v. parahaemolyticus...” (Dissertation for the degree of PhD, ISBN 978-82-7725-159-2, Norwegian School of Veterinary Science).

Diseases caused by intake of aquatic organisms, most especially raw or uncooked, include the following: gastroenteritis, septicemia, and diseases due to human pathogenic species as v. cholerae, v. parahaemolyticus, and v. vulnificus. “Non-cholera diarrheal diseases are ‘mild’ and self-limited and physicians may not be consulted. If they are, samples are seldom retrieved and analyzed unless the disease becomes more serious. Additionally, it is possible that when samples are collected they are not ana-

This is proof positive that the food laws set forth in Scripture are not merely superficial legalistic requirements with ritualistic significance.

lyzed with respect to vibrio” (ibid, p. 18).

Human diseases may be derived from the following aquatic organisms: several species of cultured fish, salmonids, fish, bivalves, crustaceans, corals (tropical), mollusks, shrimp, gorgonians, shellfish, coral (red sea), oyster larvae, juvenile turbot, sea brim, eel, founder, aquatic salmon, (rayfish) penaeids, prawn, scallop, juvenile turbot, prawns, bivalves, eel, etc. (ibid, p. 19).

The book is rather technical and complicated. However it is proof positive that scientific protocols or research methods were used to ascertain the virulence of most types of seafood ingested into human bodies, even when heated (“cooked”) but most especially when taken raw.

Analytical methods used include classic microbiological methods and molecular reaction, colony hybridization, molecular typing techniques, etc. Even if proper hygienic practices are implemented, the virulent strains of viruses cannot be eliminated from unclean seafood, inclusive of wound infections or external physiological effects from seawater samples.

This is proof positive that the food laws set forth in Scripture are not merely superficial legalistic requirements with ritualistic significance. Rather, they are valid health laws instituted by God to prevent or decrease the likelihood of various diseases.

Scriptural References: Leviticus 11; Deuteronomy 14

# Should We Venerate Mary and the Saints?

## Part 2

by Mike James

**Editor's note:** This is part two of a series examining the practice of veneration of Mary and the saints. Once the study is complete, we'll offer the entire series as a booklet.

### PAGAN SURVIVALS IN CHRISTIANITY

#### (Chapter 3)

Before we move into the details of the veneration of Mary and the saints, we first need to recognize how the Christian Church, in the first few centuries of its existence, took over and “Christianized” pagan practices. This is a well-known fact for anyone who has done some research on the early Christian Church. Perhaps the two greatest examples of “Christianized” pagan customs are the two most prominent holidays in Christianity, Christmas and Easter.

Today December 25 is celebrated as the birthday of Jesus, although this celebration did not take place until the fourth century, A.D. The celebration of Christmas did not take root in Christianity until 300 years after Christ's ascension to heaven. Scripture and history make it clear the early Christians continued to observe the biblical holy days mentioned in Leviticus 23 (Acts 2:1; Acts 20:6, 16; 1 Corinthians 5:7–8). Slowly, as the Church began to take on more pagan converts, it took on the Roman celebration date for the Sun god and claimed the date of December 25 for Christ. In ancient Greece, there had been a Sun-festival known as the Helia celebrated on December 25.<sup>6</sup>

Lent might better be compared with the fast which preceded the celebration of the Eleusinian mysteries, commemorating Demeter's period of abstinence from food during her search for her ravished daughter Persephone.<sup>7</sup> Growing up Greek Orthodox, I had always assumed we fasted for 40 days because Jesus did so prior to His temptation by Satan. I came to learn there is no mention of a fast preceding Christ's resurrection in Scripture. Christ's encounter with Satan also takes place at the beginning of his ministry rather than a few years later, at the end.

What about the holiest day in the Christian year, Easter Sunday? A little research into the word Easter will reveal it derives from the name of an ancient pagan goddess, Ishtar or Astarte. Hard to believe, but truth is sometimes stranger than fiction.

In some cases, Christian churches were erected on the same locations where previous pagan temples stood. Saints took on the attributes of previous pagan gods. And as we have just seen above, pagan festivals were repackaged into Christian holidays and festivals. The people were taught that the saints were not to be worshipped like Christ, but that they were merely mediators between God and men; but the people, polytheistic in their nature, were sure to regard them as they regarded Christ the great Mediator.<sup>8</sup> Greek religion was not obliterated by Christianity, but that the two were fused, and after the process was complete many of the older forms and beliefs reappeared.<sup>9</sup>

In its veneration of the Virgin Mary, not only did Roman Catholic Christianity absorb many elements of the cults of Greek and Roman goddesses, but Mary in effect replaced these deities and continued them in a Christian form.<sup>10</sup> Even Mary's mother Anne is a saint with many followers. There is no historic or archaeological evidence to suggest Anne was real—other than the apocryphal writings that mention her. How, then, did she become so important in the cultic practice of the church? The veneration of “St. Anne” may also be due to pagan survivals. Pagans dating back to the first century knew of a goddess named Anne. As Anne Perenna, she is mentioned by the Roman poet Ovid as a provider of provisions.<sup>11</sup> Romans also associated her with the figure of a water nymph in whose honor cups were emptied, and in Celtic pagan traditions she appears as Dana.<sup>12</sup> All these pagan traditions have been added to the cult of St. Anne in various Catholic countries.<sup>13</sup> Those who worship in the many festivals for St. Anne are not aware that they participate in rites much more ancient than Christianity, ceremonies with pagan origins in which Anne, or a Roman goddess, or Dana, the goddess of the Celts, was religiously venerated.<sup>14</sup> Neither the name nor the development of the festival has changed much through the centuries.<sup>15</sup>

In his book, *The Myth of Mary*, author Cesar Vidal addresses ten similarities between Marian devotion and the worship of pagan mother goddesses:



- Both were honored through visual means (sculptures, paintings, or icons).
- Mary and the goddesses were the mother of all.
- Both were worshipped with a child.
- Both are associated with the sun and the horns of a cow (since the lower Middle Ages the crescent moon over Mary's head looks similar to the cow horns of pagan goddesses).
- Both are associated with the harvest—it is common to associate agricultural work in Catholic countries with some particular virgin who is seen as the patron of those specific people.
- Mary and the goddesses are both associated with the possibility of influencing lives beyond the grave.
- The worship of stones or litholatry
- Both venerated in grottos or in caves.
- The connection of Mary and goddesses to the mountains or mountain ranges
- The sacrifice of sexuality

Again, a couple of the items on this list (images) are condemned in Scripture (Exodus 20:4–5; Deuteronomy 5:8–10). Artemis, also in her assimilation with Hecate, was venerated at crossroads. This tradition is obvious in the case of Marian veneration in countries such as Spain or Greece, where it is easy to find hermitages and shrines where roads cross each other.<sup>16</sup>

Schmidt also tells of a ceremony which takes place in Arachova on the evening before the festival of the “Presentation of the Virgin” on November 21.<sup>17</sup> “A porridge... is eaten by the family for the purpose of asking the Virgin for a favorable harvest the following year.”<sup>18</sup> This ceremony also appears to be a survival of the offerings of the first-fruits, which were originally made to Demeter or to some agrarian goddess, and which now have been transferred to the Virgin.<sup>19</sup>

In its theology and ethics, Christianity has been profoundly influenced by its contacts with Greek philosophy; in its ritual and hagiology (literature dealing with the lives and legends of the saints) it owes an equal debt to ancient Greek religion, which has also handed over an enormous mass of superstitious beliefs.<sup>20</sup> In the resultant blend, Christianity has incorporated pagan beliefs and usages, which, though modified, have remained essentially Greek to this day.<sup>21</sup> A great amount of original Christianity has been lost to mainline Christianity. The living legacy of ancient Greece to the Christian Church of today includes theological and ethical concepts, rites and ceremonies, and, also, alas a great body of unworthy superstitions.<sup>22</sup>

Another connection between Mary worship and paganism is the Rosary. In a number of Marian apparitions, Mary tells the seers that praying the Rosary can help save the world from its dire situation. The Church dedicates October 7 on its liturgical calendar to celebrate the Rosary. For Catholics, the Rosary became a popular tool in Marian veneration in the Middle Ages. The Rosary is a set of meditative prayers that recall events in the lives of Jesus and Mary. It is also the string of beads Catholics use to count the prayers. The Rosary gets its name from Mary's association (in the Middle Ages) with the sign of the rose. The origin of such a connection has been sought out in the apocryphal book of Ecclesiasticus (24:14) which says, “I was exalted like the Rose of Jericho,” although the passage obviously has nothing to do with her.<sup>23</sup>

The earliest use of prayer beads, like the rosary, can be traced back to Hinduism. The Hindus used prayer beads similar to the rosary to pray to Vishnu and Shiva. Buddhists and Sikhs used similar prayer beads. Even within Sufi Islam prayer beads can be found in the ninth century. In all the cases mentioned, the rosary (prayer beads) served as an instrument to exalt the respective divinities of each religion through a constant repetition of the divine name.<sup>24</sup>

Besides its origins in paganism, the Rosary is not a valid tool for prayer because of various biblical scriptures. First of all, the Bible teaches us not to pray in vain repetitions (Matthew 6:7–8). The “Hail Mary” prayer is used over and over again in the Rosary. The Bible also teaches there is one mediator between

man and God (1 Timothy 2:5–6), which is Jesus Christ. By praying to Mary we are praying to another mediator. If you doubt that Catholics think of Mary as a mediator, notice what they said at the Vatican II Council: “Because after her assumption into heaven she has not set aside this saving function, but continues to obtain for us, with her multiple intercession, the gifts relative to eternal salvation. With her maternal love, she cares for the brothers of her son that still journey and move among dangers and distresses until they reach the happy homeland.”<sup>25</sup>

Vatican II went on to use the titles of Advocate, Assistant, Helper, and Mediator. This title Mediatrix, however, applied not only to Mary’s place in the history of salvation but also to her continuing position as intercessor between Christ and humanity—so that it was possible to “demand salvation of thee [Mary].”<sup>26</sup> In fact, God had chosen her for the specific task of pleading the case of humanity before her Son. Mary was addressed as the one who could bring cleansing and healing to the sinner and as the one who would give succor against the temptations of the devil; but she did this by mediating between Christ and humanity.<sup>27</sup> This sounds great, and Catholics can believe whatever they want, but there are no Bible verses that can back up this kind of belief. Religious leaders should be leery of establishing beliefs that are not rooted in the Bible (Matthew 15:9).

But getting back to the Rosary, there are other ideas as to how the practice moved into Christianity. In 1041, Lady Godiva of Coventry left in her will a circlet of gems on which she used to say her prayers.<sup>28</sup> It was, she specified, to be hung round a statue of the Virgin.<sup>29</sup> Although the exact point of entry of the Rosary into Western Christendom is not known, the Crusaders are generally given the credit for spreading a habit picked up from their Moslem adversaries.<sup>30</sup> But as the legacy of Lady Godiva shows, the practice of counting one’s prayers was known in England before the First Crusade and may therefore have arisen spontaneously, or it may have been imported by pilgrims to the holy land.<sup>31</sup>

By the end of the sixteenth century, Pope Pius V pushed for the use of the Rosary with a bull, or proclamation. He also instituted a feast for Mary in 1573 to commemorate a victory over the Turks in 1571. The battle had been given to God’s side, said the Pope, through the intercession of the Virgin obtained by the Rosaries offered to her on earth by confraternities of Rome.<sup>32</sup> The Pope’s evidence for devotion to the Rosary was a vision by St. Dominic of the Madonna. According to tradition, Dominic, while conducting the Inquisition against the Albigensian heretics at the beginning of the thirteenth century, had been given the Rosary in a vision by the Virgin herself, who told him that Christian men and women should invoke her aid on the beads.<sup>33</sup> This story helped popularize the use of the Rosary. A number of popes after Pius V encouraged the use of the rosary based on this story.

If Dominic did see a vision, was God the source of it? Many religious figures throughout history have claimed visions from God, but God is not always the source of visions. It is interesting that the Catholic Church would promote this story knowing what the Church did to the Albigensians. The Catholics perpetrated a genocidal crusade against this group.

We will discuss apparitions of the Virgin a bit later, but many of the apparitions in the nineteenth and twentieth century had some connection to the Rosary. Let us keep this in mind when we begin to investigate the Marian apparitions.

There are many other similarities between Marian devotion and the ancient worship of a mother goddess, suggesting that the more ancient forms of worship survived through the veneration of Mary. Keep in mind that, as we address these survivals, there is no biblical admonition for veneration of Mary. One example is the large number of monuments from ancient Babylon which depict the mother goddess Semiramis with her child Tammuz in her arms. Another example is the plethora of images of goddesses suckling their infant divine offspring. Mary with the baby Jesus on her lap or suckling is a common theme in Catholic and Orthodox depictions. The theme of the nursing Virgin probably originated in Egypt, where the goddess Isis had been portrayed suckling the infant Horus for over a thousand years before Christ.<sup>34</sup> One writer goes as far to say that “the ancient portrait of Isis and the child Horus was ultimately accepted not only in popular opinion, but by formal episcopal sanction as the portrait of the Virgin and her child.”<sup>35</sup> Some of the same statues that were worshipped as the mother goddess and her child were renamed as Mary and the baby Jesus. “When Christianity triumphed,” says one writer, “these paintings and figures became those of the Madonna and child without any break in continuity: no archaeologist, in fact, can now tell whether some of these objects represent the one or the other.”<sup>36</sup>

In the Greek Orthodox Church, at the end of some liturgies on Sunday, there is a special short memorial service for loved ones who have recently died. Again, there is no biblical basis for what we are about to describe. A cake like item is placed on a table symbolizing the lost loved one. The priest prays over the cake

symbolizing the departed family member, who is believed to be with God. At the end of this service, the family members of the dearly departed receive a small bag of Kolyva (what the cake-like item is made of)—a mixture of wheat and grain. Such cake offerings can be traced to the sixth century in connection with the Assumption, and seem to be the survival of first-fruit offerings, such as those offered the Syrian goddess of agriculture, and now transferred to Mary.<sup>37</sup>

These cake-like offerings have their roots in antiquity. Another example comes from the Greek island of Zante. The peasants bring such a cake, there called *sperma*, or vesper offerings, to the church in a basket at the celebration of the “Holy Transfiguration of Christ” on August 6, and at the “Assumption of the Virgin” on August 15.<sup>38</sup> It is put in the middle of the church on a stand with a candle burning nearby. During mass, the priest blesses it and strews the chancel with a portion of it broken into crumbs, and distributes the rest among the people, who eat it and make a wish.<sup>39</sup> This ceremony recalls the “first-fruit” offerings at certain old Athenian festivals.<sup>40</sup>

Even when Christianity came to the new world we find examples of a syncretism between the mother goddess of the indigenous Mexican people and Mary. The female deities of the Mexican people were powerful symbols of staple foods, fertility, and sexuality.<sup>41</sup> Mary came to be identified with the fruit of the maguey plant—a large cactus—the fermented juice of which produced the alcoholic drink pulque.<sup>42</sup> Pulque was drunk at festivals, was offered to the gods, and was associated with fertility and plenty, the domain of the goddess Mayahuel.<sup>43</sup>

The Franciscan missionaries who converted the first indigenous Mexicans to Christianity were concerned with the Christians they were creating. They adhered ardently to Mary in her immaculate purity but could not easily trust the indigenous priests, who served the vast majority of new parishes throughout the land, to do so.<sup>44</sup> It was too easy to merge Mary with indigenous deities, and this is what the bearers of Christianity feared most.<sup>45</sup>

The primary Feast days dedicated to the Virgin Mary in Orthodoxy and Catholicism are March 25 (Annunciation) and August 15 (Assumption). The Annunciation commemorates the announcement of the coming birth of Jesus and the Assumption commemorates the bodily taking up of Mary into heaven. Both of these dates are on the exact dates of pagan celebrations to mother goddess figures. Hera, the queen of the Greek gods, presided over the spring season which begins at the spring equinox (March 25). In pagan Rome, March 25 was a holiday celebrating the annunciation of the virgin, in honor of Cybele, the mother of the Babylonian messiah.<sup>46</sup> The Romans had a three-day festival for the goddess Diana. On the first day, the goddess allegedly came to earth, and on the third day, August 15, they apparently celebrated her assumption into heaven as the queen of heaven.<sup>47</sup> But like many of the mother goddess stories, there are also connections that go further back in history.

Five thousand years ago, in southern Mesopotamia, during the month of August, when nature’s anger was most pitiless and the scorched earth and relentless drought held the farmer captive, a chant went up as the priests invoked the life-giving powers of the new season and recited the annual liturgies to Dumazi, the shepherd, and Inanna, the queen of heaven, his mother and his bride.<sup>48</sup> Dumazi had been sacrificed to the underworld, tortured and afflicted by demons, just as Christ suffered the tortures of His passion and then descended into hell.<sup>49</sup> Well, not exactly—the idea that Christ descended into hell to free the dead prior to His death and resurrection is taught in both Catholicism and Orthodoxy. The scripture used to support that belief (1 Peter 3:18–20) pertains to Christ preaching to “spirits in prison.” These are undoubtedly fallen angels who are in some manner confined to certain boundaries, and whose disobedience was evident in the time of Noah, but it is doubtful that Christ’s proclamation to them occurred in the pre-Flood period. For a full explanation of this scripture please order our booklet *The Questions and Answers Book* from our website at [cgi.org](http://cgi.org) or read the booklet there online.

According to the church fathers, as early as the second century A.D., the purpose of the harrowing of hell was the liberation of the righteous dead like Abraham, David, and John the Baptist.<sup>50</sup> But the problem for Catholics is that the belief implies souls can be delivered from hell, which has been considered heresy since Augustine laid down the firm distinction between purgatory and hell.<sup>51</sup> The Council of Trent decreed the harrowing should simply be seen as a metaphor of Christ’s victory over death and evil.<sup>52</sup>

In order to accommodate the problem, another region of the afterlife, limbo, a shadowy world of neither pain nor joy, has been accepted since Aquinas.<sup>53</sup> There, according to contemporary teaching, the righteous who died before Christ (or some of them—John the Baptist definitely in heaven) and the innocent who have not been redeemed, like unbaptized babies, spin out eternity in a kind of numb nirvana.<sup>54</sup> But only one papal document mentions limbo and belief is not mandatory.<sup>55</sup>

Perhaps the origins of the story of Christ's descent into hell also come from paganism. The harrowing of hell recalls other gods' epic tussles with the forces of destruction: the underworld raided by Herakles and Orpheus; the victory of Osiris over Set and his triumph as judge over the living and the dead.<sup>56</sup> We are not saying the Catholics and Orthodox consciously used these stories, but the early church fathers were perhaps spiritually influenced to misinterpret Scripture (Ephesians 6:12).

But getting back to Innanna and Dumazi, notice some more connections to Christ and Mary. In the religion of Sumer, Inanna was the "lady of heaven," and Dumuzi was the guardian of flocks, a shepherd. His name means "true son," and in some Sumerian laments he is called Duma, the child.<sup>57</sup> Yes, this sounds like Christ and Mary, and this and other similarities between the ancient mother goddess and son have led some to believe the story of Christ was just a myth originating in ancient pagan stories. But further study of the pagan "christs" and the true Messiah will reveal some important differences. Finally, let us not forget that Satan has made an effort to deceive the whole world (Revelation 12:9). One of the ways he does this is by casting doubt on the truth of Jesus Christ and influencing people to misinterpret His Word.

Now some will argue Mary is a biblical figure and not a pagan goddess. No doubt this is true, but the degree to which some Christians go in their devotion to Mary is not consistent with what Scripture has to say about her. In my view, this excess devotion gets into the realm of idolatry. I grew up in the Greek Orthodox Church and witnessed the excess and gratuitous devotion to Mary, which is not supported by Scripture. As society has gotten more sophisticated, so has Satan's deception. He has created a figure and inserted it into Christianity rather than outside Christianity—to take some of the focus off of Christ. In my mind, this is not much different than the apostasy of the ancient Israelites who mixed the worship of the true God with other gods. In Judges 2:13 we read about Israel forsaking the worship of Yahweh and worshipping Baal and Ashtaroah. Ashtaroah was the name of the mother goddess figure at that time. Later, in the time of Jeremiah, Israel is rebuked for worshipping the "queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 44:17–19).

Mother goddess worship was very popular in the ancient Roman Empire into which Christianity began. Inscriptions prove that the two (the mother and child) received divine honors, not only in Italy and especially at Rome, but also in the provinces, particularly in Africa, Spain, Portugal, France, Germany and Bulgaria.<sup>58</sup>

One of the best examples of the carryover from paganism to Christianity is mother goddess worship. Many pagans were drawn to Christianity, but they were not willing to give up all their prior beliefs. Just as ancient Israel mixed the worship of the true God with false gods, Christianity began to mix with prior pagan beliefs. As we have seen and will further see, the parallels between mother goddess worship and Marian veneration is striking. Did this just happen by coincidence? Were churchmen looking for more converts? Or is there something more sinister afoot? Hopefully this booklet will answer those questions.

As we noted earlier, no great emphasis was placed on Mary in the early centuries of the Church. This point is admitted by the *Catholic Encyclopedia* also: "Devotion to Our Blessed Lady in its ultimate analysis must be regarded as a practical application of the doctrine of the Communion of the Saints. Seeing that the doctrine is not contained, at least explicitly, in the earlier forms of the Apostles' Creed, there is perhaps no ground for surprise if we do not meet with any clear traces of the cultus of the Blessed Virgin in the first Christian centuries," the worship of Mary being a later development.<sup>59</sup>

By the early part of the fourth century we begin to see evidence of Marian worship influenced by the goddess worship of the pagans. At this time such worship was frowned upon by the church. This is evident by the words of Epiphanius (bishop of Salamis 315–403 A.D.) who denounced the Collyridians (Christian heretics) for worshipping Mary as a goddess and offering cakes to her.<sup>60</sup> She should be held in high honor, he said, "But let no one adore Mary."<sup>61</sup>

At the beginning of the fifth century the Roman Empire was experiencing changes. Emperor Theodosius's ban on pagan worship and his destruction of statues and temples to gods and goddesses were keenly felt by the country people, now forced into the cities for safety from the invading barbarians.<sup>62</sup> Historian Pamela Berger observes that "The exclusion of any female images from the Christian concept of deity was particularly hard on agricultural people whose experience with the growth and life-producing forces had been connected with the female principle for millennia. At the same time, Christian doctrine was becoming devoid of all imagery incorporating a female aspect into the divine."<sup>63</sup>

Approximately thirty years later at the Council of Ephesus (431 A.D.) the church provided Mary with the title "Theotokos," the "Godbearer" or "Mother of God." A number of commentators today attribute the enthusiasm for this deci-

sion to the city's having long been the seat of worship to Diana; a new church dedicated to Mary would soon rise over the old temple to the goddess which had been destroyed in 400.<sup>64</sup>

Another example that Marian worship developed from pagan goddess worship pertains to the names given to Mary. For example, Mary is often called "the Madonna." According to Hislop, this phrase is the translation of one of the titles for the Babylonian goddess. In deified form, Nimrod was known as Baal. The title of his wife, the female divinity, would be the equivalent of Baalti. In English, this word means, "My Lady," in Latin, "Mea Domina," and in Italian, it is corrupted into the well-known "Madonna."<sup>65</sup> Isis, the Egyptian goddess figure, was known as the "mother of god." This same title was applied to Mary at the Council of Ephesus, which was presided over by St. Cyril of Alexandria (Egypt). Among the Phoenicians, the mother goddess was known as "The Lady of the Sea." Mary also is known by a similar title, "Our Lady, Star of the Sea," among certain sea faring locations. This could just be a coincidence, or it could be some type of syncretism among those who passed on the old beliefs.

## THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION

### (Chapter 4)

The doctrine of the Immaculate Conception is a Roman Catholic doctrine that refers to Mary the mother of Jesus. The doctrine states that Mary was born without "original sin." Original sin stems from the disobedience of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. Since that first sin in the garden, all of humanity is born with this predilection to sin due to our original parents Adam and Eve. The Orthodox Church believes Mary was sinless from birth, but was not born without original (or "ancestral") sin. The Church of God International does not believe in original sin (as defined by the Catholic Church) but believes that all humanity, including Mary, are born with a carnal nature that leads us to sin during our physical life.

To better understand this Catholic doctrine we need to understand their dualistic view of life. According to the dualistic view, at conception a body is formed in the womb of a mother as a result of insemination of a father.<sup>66</sup> At the moment of the conception of the body, a soul is created and infused into the body.<sup>67</sup> This process is called animation, that is, the implantation of an *anima* (which is the Latin term for the soul) into the body.<sup>68</sup> Each soul is infused into the body with the stain of the original sin.<sup>69</sup> Under normal circumstances, such a stain is supposed to be removed at baptism soon after the birth of the child.<sup>70</sup> In the case of Mary, however, the stain of original sin was not removed at baptism, but was excluded altogether from her soul at the time of conception.<sup>71</sup> Thus, the conception of Mary was immaculate because she was exempted from the presence of original sin in her soul and from inherited sin in her body.<sup>72</sup>

To understand how some Christians came to believe in Mary's Immaculate Conception, we need to understand early Christian views on virginity. The roots of the dogma of Mary's perpetual virginity may have multiple sources. Some thought the end of the world was near, so they chose not to have children. Others thought renouncing sex would make them holier. Beginning in the second century, small groups of Christian men and women committed to sexual renunciation scattered throughout the eastern Mediterranean as missionaries of celibacy.<sup>73</sup> As the enthusiasm for permanent sexual renunciation grew, it won over bishops like Athanasius, Basil, and Augustine.<sup>74</sup>

Some within Christianity thought sexual intercourse was sinful in some way. Augustine, an early influencer in Catholic dogma (354–430 A.D.), taught that original sin was transmitted by the act of procreation. Augustine suggested that either the hereditary taint was transmitted through the male genitals themselves during intercourse, and that the body itself, not the soul, was genetically flawed by the fall of man, or that because a child cannot be conceived outside the sexual embrace, which necessarily involves the sin of passion, the child is stained from that moment.<sup>75</sup> Ambrose (340–397), the Bishop of Milan, and Jerome (347–420), an influential priest and theologian, also thought the celibate life was more spiritual. Jerome even wrote a treatise against the Stoic philosopher Helvidius defending the perpetual virginity of Mary. But the views of these influential Christian leaders are in opposition to the God-ordained creation of sex in marriage (Genesis 1:28; Hebrews 13:4).

To better understand Augustine's theology of original sin we need to understand Augustine's thinking before he became a Christian. Prior to becoming a Christian, Augustine was influenced by both Manichaeism and by the writing of Plotinus. Both Mani and Plotinus had a distaste for the world, a profound sense of a breach between things of the flesh and things of the spirit, and a restless quest for spiritual fulfillment through detachment from earthly concerns and

pleasures.<sup>76</sup> Plotinus wrote, “The soul has become ugly, by being immersed in what is not itself, by its descent into the body.”<sup>77</sup>

The Eastern Church (Orthodox) also had influential leaders that mirrored the teaching of the Western Church with a negative perception of the female. John Chrysostom, Archbishop of Constantinople, warned: “The whole of her bodily beauty is nothing less than phlegm, blood, bile, rheum, and the fluid of digested food.... If you consider what is stored up behind those lovely eyes, the angle of the nose, the mouth and the cheeks you will agree that the well-proportioned body is merely a whitened sepulcher.”<sup>78</sup>

It was therefore essential that the Son of the Highest should not be contaminated by any of this sinfulness, inherent in the whole human species but more pronounced in the female.<sup>79</sup> Thus during the ascetic revolt of Christianity’s first centuries, the need to exempt the mother of Christ from tainted sexuality and to proclaim her virgin purity exerted an overwhelming pressure on definitions of doctrine and on scriptural commentaries.<sup>80</sup> Many Christian theologians were influenced by Neo-Platonism (Plotinus was an early adherent). When that happened, Christian asceticism expressed itself in a rejection of the body that appeared to deny that God had created it, and therefore in a revulsion at sexuality that equated it with immorality.<sup>81</sup> Because most writers on the subject were men, and unmarried men at that, the revulsion easily became a misogynous contempt for women as the devil’s snare to corrupt the *vita angelica* of the ascetic or celibate man.<sup>82</sup> The idea that sex was sinful helped influence some that Mary had to be virgin in order to be the “God-bearer.” Finally, in 451 A.D. at the Council of Chalcedon, the concept of Mary’s perpetual virginity was recognized by the Church.

This poses a problem when we investigate scriptures that clearly teach Jesus had brothers and sisters (Matthew 13:55–56; Mark 6:3; John 2:12; John 7:3; Galatians 1:18–19; 1 Corinthians 9:5). The Eastern Church Fathers taught that these “brothers” were step-brothers from a previous marriage Joseph possibly had. The Western Church Fathers taught these “brothers” were first or second cousins of Jesus. These reasons are used due to the Orthodox (East) and Catholic (West) teaching that Mary remained a virgin for her entire life.

There are some problems with the idea that Jesus did not have younger siblings. Tertullian, Hegesippus, and John Chrysostom, among other fathers of the



**Pope Pius IX formally defined the dogma of the Immaculate Conception on December 8, 1854.**

Church, denied the perpetual virginity of Mary and affirmed that the “brothers and sisters” of Jesus which the Gospels mention (Matthew 13:54–55; Mark 6:3) were Mary’s children.<sup>83</sup> Another problem is the census of Caesar Augustus addressed in Luke 2. If Joseph had at least six children from a previous marriage, we would expect them to travel with him as a family, especially since every family member was expected to register.<sup>84</sup> Luke 2:5 only mentions Mary and Joseph registering. Another problem is Matthew 1:24–25. Here it mentions that Joseph “knew her not, till she had brought forth her firstborn son.” The implication here is Joseph and Mary had not been together sexually until

after Jesus was born. Some argue the Greek wording does not have to mean they did come together sexually afterward. But why would they not, since they were married and there is nothing wrong with sexual relations in marriage (Hebrews 13:4). As we have already seen there was an anti-sexual theme in early Christianity.

Before we can understand the development of the perpetual virginity of Mary we must understand what came before this notion. There is only one direct mention of Mary in New Testament texts pertaining to the period following the death of Jesus (see Acts 1:14). We do not find reference to Mary or her family in material dating from the late first or early second centuries.<sup>85</sup> Tradition tells us Mary’s parents were Joachim and Anne. There is no reference of these people before the apocryphal writings known as the Protoevangelium of James (140–170 A.D.), the Gospel of Pseudo Matthew (seventh–ninth century) and the Book of the Birth of Mary (second century).<sup>86</sup> It is doubtful we can trust these sources. They were written long after the events they describe. In the first two cases, the authors tried to deceive the reader, falsely attributing the work to Matthew and James, important figures in the primitive church.<sup>87</sup>

Taking a closer look at the Protoevangelium of James, we begin to see why the idea that Mary was “ever Virgin” begins to take shape. It’s depiction of Saint Joseph as an elderly widower made Mary’s virginity more secure in the minds of many and provided a handy way of explaining that the “brothers and sisters of

the Lord” were children from Joseph’s first marriage.<sup>88</sup> The book also states Mary was conceived without sex due to the infertility of her mother Anna. Scholars believe the book was written sometime between 140 and 170 A.D. The book also asserts Mary was a virgin before, during, and after the birth of Christ.

We must remember this Protoevangelium of James (also called the Gospel of James) is an apocryphal book. It is not accepted as a valid biblical book, and for good reason. Scholars believe the book may have been written by the Ebionites. The group was a sect within early Christianity. They also fell into a praise of sexual asceticism, to the point of considering virginity to be something morally superior to matrimony.<sup>89</sup> Even Catholic scholars admit the idea of Mary’s virginal childbirth does not come from Scripture. Catholic priest, J.M. Carda has noted: “The Holy Scriptures do not mention the historical origin of Mary; nor do they expressly allude to any privilege in her conception.”<sup>90</sup>

The idea of Mary’s perpetual virginity began to gain traction in the fourth century. The Second Council of Constantinople proclaimed her perpetual virginity in 381 A.D. Later, in 649 A.D. Mary’s perpetual virginity becomes a dogma of the church.

During the Middle Ages, other famous theologians supported the concept of Mary’s perpetual virginity. On the Catholic side, Thomas Aquinas was a proponent of Mary always being a virgin. For example, he argues that if Mary had intercourse with Joseph after the birth of Jesus, that would be “an insult to the Holy Ghost, whose shrine was the vaginal womb wherein he had formed the flesh of Christ; wherefore it is unbecoming that it should be desecrated by intercourse with man.”<sup>91</sup> On the Protestant side, Martin Luther wrote, “It is an article of faith that Mary is Mother of the Lord and still a virgin.... Christ we believe, came forth from a womb left perfectly intact.”<sup>92</sup> Calvin referred to Mary as “Holy Virgin.”<sup>93</sup> and Swiss reformer Ulrich Zwingli (1484–1531) said, “I firmly believe that Mary, according to the words of the Gospel, as a pure Virgin brought forth for us the Son of God and in childbirth and after childbirth forever remained a pure, intact Virgin.”<sup>94</sup>

One scripture that is sometimes used to set Mary apart from the rest of humanity is Luke 1:28. The verse states that Mary was “highly favored,” which could be translated “full of grace.” Once again, Catholic J.M. Carda makes it clear that the word for grace and favor here, *kekharitomene*, does not equal the grace bestowed on Christ. Carda states that *kekharitomene*, “does not indicate itself a fullness of grace, as indicated by, on the other hand, the expression *pleres kharitos* that is applied to Christ (John 1:14)... The word addressed to her by the angel meant simply blessed.”<sup>95</sup> In fact, the same word used to describe Mary’s grace in Luke 1:28 is also used to describe Christian’s in Ephesians 1:6. The point being, the grace bestowed on Mary is no greater or lesser than the grace bestowed on other believers. This verse also mentions that Mary is blessed among women. Some take this to mean she is above all women. That is not the case. In Judges 5:24, Jael receives a similar blessing among women. No one is saying Jael is set apart like Mary.

The idea that Mary was ever-Virgin goes hand in hand with the idea that she was sinless. Both of these ideas eventually meld as the Catholic Church developed it’s concept of the “Immaculate Conception” of Mary. For the first couple centuries of Christianity, none of the writers mention that Mary was without sin. The first reference to a sinless conception of Mary is from Julian of Eclanum, during the fifth century A.D.<sup>96</sup> Julian was a Pelagian and did not believe in Augustine’s concept of “original sin.” Augustine did believe Mary was born with original sin, but her new spiritual birth, due to the grace of God, had freed her from it.<sup>97</sup> As paradoxical as it seems, close to a millennium later, the Catholic Church would embrace the heretic’s position and reject that of Augustine.<sup>98</sup> Even Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), another giant in the Catholic Church, believed Mary had sinned. In the last work written by Aquinas, *Brevis Summa de Fide*, Aquinas states: “Certainly [Mary] was conceived with original sin, as is natural.... If she would not have been born with original sin, she would not have needed to be redeemed by Christ, and this being so, Christ would not be the universal Redeemer of men, which would abolish the dignity of Christ.”<sup>99</sup>

Through the efforts of Duns Scotus, the doctrine that Mary was born without original sin began gaining ground in the heart of Catholicism near the end of the



**Pope Pius XII declared the doctrine of the Assumption of Mary a dogma for Roman Catholics on November 1, 1950.**

thirteenth century.<sup>100</sup> In the fifteenth century the claims of Mary's Immaculate Conception were causing division. In 1439, the Council of Basel, which was not considered an ecumenical council, stated that belief in the "Immaculate Conception" was in line with the Catholic faith. The Council of Trent, in 1546, marked an advancement in immaculatism by affirming: "We do not wish to enclose in the decree in which original sin is dealt with, the blessed and immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God."<sup>101</sup> In other words Mary had no original sin. In the same way, it was insisted that in all her life she never committed any sin, not even a trivial one.<sup>102</sup> Two other separate decisions of the Council (Trent 1545-1563) were much more momentous in Mariology, however: that the unwritten traditions of the Church and its members were to be held in equal honor as Scripture; and that the Vulgate Bible was the only canonical text.<sup>103</sup> Regarding the first of these decisions, Owen Chadwick has pointed out that "It is clear that some of those who framed it were thinking not of an unwritten heritage of doctrine, but of certain practices, like the keeping of Sunday or the baptism of infants."<sup>104</sup> But whatever the intention of the councilors, the decree gave traditional beliefs, like the legends and miracles that fleshed out Mary of Nazareth, a claim to canonical authority.<sup>105</sup>

The ideas of Duns Scotus were being attacked by those who looked to Scripture as to what to believe in. Scripture makes it clear (Romans 3:23) that all have sinned, and that includes Mary. Only Christ is without sin (2 Corinthians 5:21; 1 John 3:5; Hebrews 4:15). In the sixteenth century in England, men at Oxford actually tore up folios of Duns Scotus and used them as waste paper.<sup>106</sup> Belief in the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception "did not crumble, but built new foundations that it formed according to sixteenth century principles, in the Bible, interpreted allegorically in the patristic tradition."<sup>107</sup>

During the eighteenth century the Church was abandoned altogether for the first time by the intellectual elite of Europe. "Belief in the Immaculate

Conception became an act of defiance against rationalism.... [W]hen Pope Pius IX proclaimed *Ineffabilis Deus*, he was announcing that the Pope's authority to command the beliefs of Christendom had not been shattered by the philosophical and political turmoil of the age of skepticism."<sup>108</sup>

The official dogma of the Immaculate Conception (*Ineffabilis Deus*) was proclaimed by Pope Pius IX on December 8, 1854. Pius defined the dogma by saying: "We declare, pronounce and define that the doctrine which asserts that the Blessed Virgin Mary, from the first moment of her conception, by a singular grace and privilege of Almighty God and in view of the merits of Jesus Christ, Savior of the human race, was preserved free from every stain of original sin is a doctrine revealed by God and, for this reason, must be firmly and constantly believed by the faithful."<sup>109</sup> "The intent of the dogma of the Immaculate Conception...is revealed in the encyclical *Ubi Primum*...that through her are obtained every hope, every grace, and all salvation. For this is His will, that we obtain everything through Mary."<sup>110</sup> With language like that no wonder Mary is such a powerful figure in the Catholic Church. "By proclaiming dogma a belief that had been stormily discussed since the twelfth century, he also asserted the position of the pope as the single, divinely inspired head of the Church and implied that the Church alone was the true spiritual guide and not the individual conscience as the men of the Reformation and their heirs had maintained.... It was only logical that Pius IX followed up the Bull of 1854 with another, in 1870, proclaiming the infallibility of the pope a dogma of the church."<sup>111</sup> According to Justo Gonzales, a "respected Church historian...Pius IX was the first pope ever to define a dogma on his own, without the support of a counsel."<sup>112</sup>

As we can see, the concept that Mary was born without sin and that she lived a sinless life is not based on Scripture. Even the *Catholic Encyclopedia* makes this clear: "no direct or categorical and stringent proof of the dogma [Immaculate Conception] can be brought forward from Scripture."<sup>113</sup>

## End Notes

- <sup>6</sup> Ibid, p. 92.
- <sup>7</sup> Hyde, p. 98.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid, p. 56.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid, p. 42.
- <sup>10</sup> Stephen Benko, *The Virgin Goddess* (E.J. Brill: Leiden/New York/Koln, 1993), p. 2.
- <sup>11</sup> Cesar Vidal, *The Myth of Mary* (Chick Publications: China, CA 1995), p. 32.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ibid, p. 33.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>15</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>16</sup> Vidal, p. 98.
- <sup>17</sup> Hyde, p. 133.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid, p. 220.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Hyde, p. 221.
- <sup>23</sup> Vidal, p. 111.
- <sup>24</sup> Ibid, p. 112.
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid, p. 150.
- <sup>26</sup> Jaroslav Pelikan, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her Place In The History of Culture* (Yale University Press: New Haven and London 1996), p. 132.
- <sup>27</sup> Pelikan, p. 133.
- <sup>28</sup> Marina Warner, *Alone Of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York 1976), p. 305.
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- <sup>30</sup> Ibid, p. 306.
- <sup>31</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid, p. 308.
- <sup>33</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>34</sup> Warner, p. 193.
- <sup>35</sup> Homer W. Smith, *Man and His Gods* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1953), p. 216.
- <sup>36</sup> Arthur Weigall, *The Paganism in our Christianity* (New York: Putnam Sons, 1928), p. 129.
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- <sup>38</sup> Ibid, p. 131-132.
- <sup>39</sup> Ibid, p. 132.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>41</sup> Miri Rubin, *Mother of God: A History of the Virgin Mary* (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 389.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>45</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>46</sup> Sandy Simpson, "Catholic Syncretism Forms the Basis for the Teachings of the World Christian Gathering of Indigenous People Movement (WCGIP)," deception-inthechurch.com. <http://www.deception-inthechurch.com/catholicsyncretism.html>. 8/1/13. Accessed 5/11/2020.
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- <sup>48</sup> Warner, p. 206.
- <sup>49</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>50</sup> Warner, p. 320.
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- <sup>53</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>56</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>57</sup> Ibid, p. 206-207.
- <sup>58</sup> James G. Frazier, *The Golden Bough: A Study of Magic and Religion* (United States: Enhanced Media Publishing, 2015), p. 356 (Chapter 37: Oriental Religions in the West).
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- <sup>68</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>69</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>71</sup> Bacchiocchi, p.252.
- <sup>72</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>74</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>75</sup> Warner, p. 54.
- <sup>76</sup> Warner, p. 56.
- <sup>77</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>78</sup> Ibid, p. 58.
- <sup>79</sup> Ibid, p. 59.
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- <sup>81</sup> Pelikan, p. 121.
- <sup>82</sup> Ibid.
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- <sup>86</sup> Ibid, p. 28.
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- <sup>89</sup> Vidal, p. 48.
- <sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 119.
- <sup>91</sup> Bacchiocchi, p. 240.
- <sup>92</sup> Ibid, citing Weimar's *The Works of Luther*, English translation by Pelikan, Concordia, St. Louis, 1958, v. 11, pp. 319-320; v. 6. P. 510.
- <sup>93</sup> Ibid, p. 242, citing *Calvini Opera*, Corpus Reformatorum, Braunschweig-Berlin, 1863-1900, v. 45, p. 348, 35.
- <sup>94</sup> Ibid, citing *Zwingli Opera*, Corpus Reformatorum, 1905, v. 1, p. 424.
- <sup>95</sup> Vidal, p. 119.
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- <sup>97</sup> Ibid, p. 120.
- <sup>98</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. 120.
- <sup>100</sup> Ibid, p. 121.
- <sup>101</sup> Ibid, p. 138.
- <sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 138-139.
- <sup>103</sup> Warner, p. 245.
- <sup>104</sup> Ibid, citing Owen Chadwick, *The Reformation*, (London, 1972), p. 277.
- <sup>105</sup> Warner, p. 245-246.
- <sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 237.
- <sup>107</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>108</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>109</sup> Bacchiocchi, p. 250, citing Henry Denzinger, *The Sources of Catholic Dogma*, 1957, paragraph 2803, citing also *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* (note 11), p. 124, paragraph 491.
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- <sup>111</sup> Warner, p. 237.
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# A PERPETUAL “FEAST”

by Vance A. Stinson

This year (2021), the Feast of Unleavened Bread begins at sunset on March 27 and concludes at sunset on April 3. Hopefully, the profound lessons of this feast will not be forgotten once leavened products are reintroduced, but will be indelibly stamped on our hearts, enabling us to “lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us,” and to “run with endurance the race that is set before us” (Hebrews 12:1).

In other words, we should, metaphorically speaking, “keep the feast” *perpetually*—throughout our lifetimes. This is the “feast” Paul exhorted the Corinthian believers to “keep” when he urged them to “purge out the old leaven [of sinful behavior], that you may be a new lump,” and to “keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth” (1 Corinthians 5:7–8).

Make no mistake, this predominantly Gentile congregation was observing the “feasts of the LORD” (Leviticus 23), for, as David Stern explains, “If this were not so, Sha’ul’s imagery here would have been meaningless to his readers” (*The Complete Jewish Study Bible*, p. 1636, note). But in this passage, Paul is speaking *spiritually*, or metaphorically; we’re to “keep the feast” continuously by *always* staying away from the “leaven of malice and wickedness,” choosing instead the “unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.” He is speaking of a *perpetual* “feast”—a *way of life*.

The Feast of Unleavened Bread, then, is an annual reminder of what the lives of Christ’s followers should *always* look like.

## Types and Shadows

The Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread were given to ancient Israel as an annual reminder of how God delivered the nation from bondage in the land of Egypt. Christians readily recognize the types and shadows contained within the biblical account of this momentous event. We see the Christological meaning in the sacrificial lamb and in the protection provided by the “blood of the lamb.” We recognize Moses as a type of Christ, Egypt as a type of the “present evil world,” and Pharaoh as a type of the “ruler of this world.”

The Feast of Unleavened Bread itself—the seven days of eating unleavened bread instead of leavened products—points back to Israel’s dependence on Yahweh in the face of the seemingly impossible obstacles the nation encountered in its exodus from Egypt. And Israel’s experience serves as a type of our “walk of faith”—of living our lives trusting in our Father’s promises through following the One He sent to deliver us from the bondage of sin and lead us on to the “Promised Land.”

With this brief overview of the types and shadows in mind, let’s notice some specifics in God’s instructions to Israel concerning the Feast of Unleavened Bread:

“In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month at evening [at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth], you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month at evening [until the end of the twenty-first]. **For seven days no leaven shall be found in your houses**, since whoever eats what is leavened, that same person shall be cut off from the congregation of Israel, whether he is a stranger or a native of the land. You shall eat nothing leavened; in all your dwellings you shall eat unleavened bread” (Exodus 12:18–20).

Notice that the people were “unleavened” for the

entire seven-day period. The leavening was removed up front, not *gradually* over the entire seven-day period. For the Israelites, this pictured not only God’s having brought them out of Egypt “in haste” but also the *ideal* of trusting in God—of “walking by faith, not by sight”—throughout the entire process of His bringing them out of the land of Egypt. For us, then, the seven days of Unleavened Bread pictures the *ideal* of living sinlessly in Christ, depending on Him—the Bread of Life—for our spiritual sustenance.

Yet, as all of us surely know, the ideal and the reality are often two very different things. In reality, we do *not* live perfect, sinless lives! Therefore, for us, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which pictures the *ideal* of living sinlessly in Christ, *teaches* us that we are to remove sin from our lives as soon as it is discovered. For we cannot “keep the feast” as long as we hang on to the “leaven” of sin.

With this in mind, carefully read 1 John 1:5–10:

5 This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. 6 If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin. 8 If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.

If we claim to be sin-free, Johns says, we deceive ourselves. Yet, on the other hand, John says (in 1 John 3:4–10):

4 Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness. 5 And you know that He was manifested to take away our sins, and in Him there is no sin. 6 **Whoever abides in Him does not sin.** [Above, he says we deceive ourselves if we say we have no sin; yet, here he says the one who abides in Christ “does not sin.” Does this mean “does not sin at all,” or “does not sin *habitually*”?] Whoever sins has neither seen Him nor known Him. 7 Little children, let no one deceive you. He who practices righteousness [here’s the key!] is righteous, just as He is righteous. 8 He who sins [*practices* sin; sins habitually, as a way of life] is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. 9 Whoever has been born [begotten] of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he has been born [begotten] of God. [The word “cannot” does not mean “is incapable of.”] It should be understood the same way one would understand the statement, “You cannot smoke in a no-smoking zone.” 10 In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God, nor is he who does not love his brother.

While in actual fact we *do* have sins in our lives—we stumble and fall due to weakness and old habits or ingrained patterns of behavior—we cannot *practice* sin and, simultaneously, abide in Christ. *It’s one or the other!*

So the Feast of Unleavened Bread pictures *abiding in Christ*. It pictures our constant dependence on the Bread of Life for spiritual sustenance. We often emphasize the putting out of leavening, but sometimes neglect to focus on the significance of eating

unleavened bread for seven days.

## The Bread of Life

Notice John 6:27–35:

27 [Jesus said,] “Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.” 28 Then they said to Him, “What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?” 29 Jesus answered and said to them, “This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent.” 30 Therefore they said to Him, “What sign will You perform then, that we may see it and believe You? What work will You do? [He had already miraculously fed the 5,000.] 31 Our fathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written, “He gave them bread from heaven to eat.” 32 Then Jesus said to them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, Moses did not give you the bread from heaven, but My Father gives you the true bread from heaven. 33 For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.” 34 Then they said to Him, “Lord, give us this bread always.” 35 And Jesus said to them, “I am the bread of life. He who **comes to Me** shall never hunger, and he who **believes in Me** shall never thirst.”

“Eating” the “bread of life” is the equivalent of *coming to and believing in Christ*—putting one’s full trust in Him and His sacrificial and redemptive work. “Most assuredly, I say to you,” Jesus says, “he who believes in Me has everlasting life. I am the bread of life” (verse 47).

So how does one keep the perpetual “feast”? Simply stated, by *abiding in Christ*. We have been justified by His blood—His sacrificial death—but our salvation depends on His having been raised from the dead.

Paul writes (in Romans 5:6–11):

6 For when we were still without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly. 7 For scarcely for a righteous man will one die; yet perhaps for a good man someone would even dare to die. 8 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. 9 Much more then, **having now been justified** by His blood, **we shall be saved** from wrath through Him. 10 For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, **having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life.** 11 And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

The statutory Passover foreshadowed the sacrificial death of Christ, the “Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world” (John 1:29). The Feast of Unleavened Bread focuses on the Risen Lord—the Living Christ—by whose life we shall ultimately be saved *if we abide in Him*.

## Conclusion

Paul urges believers to “purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened.” Paraphrased, Paul is saying, “You have been reconciled to God through the shed blood of Jesus Christ; your sins have been forgiven; you have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, made alive in Christ, justified, declared righteous on the basis of faith. Therefore, *live your lives accordingly—abide in Him, and He will abide in you!*”

“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28).

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