

WHAT'S HAPPENING in the **ROMAN CHURCH**

A REPORT FROM ROME

By William C. Standridge

FOREWORD

One of the most fascinating and misunderstood questions facing Bible-believers today is this:

"What's Happening in the Roman Church" ?

All across the United States, Roman Catholic parishes, or entire dioceses, are joining local Councils of Churches and thus becoming involved in ecumenical cooperation. Exchanges of pulpits between Catholic priests and Protestant pastors have become common.

Recent discussions between Lutherans and Catholics have growing areas of agreement on such controversial questions as the figure of the Pope and his place in the church. Discussions between Anglicans and Catholics have found basic agreement on the Eucharist, or the Lord's Supper.

What do all these facts mean? Is it true, as many evangelical spokesmen have affirmed, that the Holy Spirit is moving today in the Roman Catholic church to bring about a great reformation, a turn towards Biblical doctrine and practice? Is it time for fundamental, Bible-believing Christians to consider the Catholic church a "sister" church, its priests as fellow-ministers of the Gospel and its members as brothers and sisters in Christ?

Or, is this church still the "Throne of Satan" and the "Mother of Harlots" as the reformers stated so forcefully? Are her members still bound by superstition and by a doctrine of salvation by works and sacraments which nullifies the truths of grace and salvation by faith, plus nothing?

In their rather naive search for the answers to these questions, many American Christians have forgotten an essential fact: The Roman Catholic is ROMAN. Its head, to whom every bishop in the world pledges total allegiance, lives in Rome, and the huge bureaucracy with its tentacles in every imaginable activity, is centered in Rome.

What's Happening in the Roman Church ?

It should come as no surprise that, whatever ferments, innovations or new ideas may be appearing in the various nations where Roman Catholicism is entrenched, no real changes, either in doctrine or in practice, can be made unless they pass through Rome and receive Rome's approval.

Therefore, no serious study of supposed changes in Roman Catholicism can overlook the position of the Pope and the real situation at the center of the Roman world. The position of the Roman church today, its tactics and its future can best be understood when viewed from Rome itself.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

William C. Standridge is an American missionary who has lived in Rome, Italy in 22 years. He has studied the Italian background of the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the daily news events which have shaken and shaped its recent history. His ability to read, write and speak fluently in Italian has given the author a unique opportunity to follow the political and religious situation in Italy. He is able to present documentation of the Roman Catholic Church which is not available to many American pastors, teachers or laymen.

Mr. Standridge writes regularly in the Italian-language monthly newspaper, "La Voce del Vangelo". He has read widely and is well acquainted with the ecumenical movement, new evangelicalism and the charismatic movement.

As an ordained fundamental Baptist minister, Mr. Standridge is a Missionary to Italy with Independent Faith Mission. Along with his Father, he helped in the original organization and founding of Independent Faith Mission.

His ministry in Italy has resulted in the establishment of local New Testament churches. He writes Gospel messages which appear in leading secular Italian publications which reach millions of Italians with the Gospel.

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Explaining the complexities of the Roman Catholic Church to non-catholics could be very similar to explaining the complexities of an elephant to a blind man.

And, there is also the very great possibility that, in discussion of the reality of the Roman Catholic Church, and even more so in the consideration of the much-publicized changes within the church, each of us may be convinced that his own personal, limited view is the only right one, and that his own personal experiences have permitted him to perfectly interpret what is happening inside the church today.

An Italian pastor recently warned that no one, who was not born and raised in a culture permeated and molded for centuries by the dominance of the Roman Catholic Church should ever pretend to understand it. And, in fact, he added that anyone who says he understands the Roman church only reveals that he doesn't understand it at all.

First, we must avoid entirely the interesting but relatively fruitless anecdotal approach to the understanding of the Roman Catholic Church. That is, "Well, I have this wonderful Catholic neighbor, and the way he talks, you know, I believe he is really saved. I'm sure the church is really changing." Or, "You know, in our town there's a priest who has taken all statues and images out of his church. And he started reading the Bible with his youth group. There's a real turn to the Bible in the Catholic church today."

This attempt to understand the Catholic Church by personal experience is very similar to the tourist who arrives in Rome for 24 hours, talks with his hotel porter, his tour guide, and a taxi driver, and goes home certain that he has understood Italian politics, religious life, and sexual mores.

Or, to put it another way, it's like the blind man who grabbed the elephant's leg and now suddenly notes that the elephant's knee is bending. And comes to the conclusion that he has just witnessed a miracle in the area of tree care.

This really brings us to a second point that must be cleared up before we study our elephant. Any living thing is constantly in movement, but this doesn't mean (unless you are an evolutionist!) that it is automatically becoming something different.

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If anything may be learned from history, it is that the Roman Catholic Church has been able to continue twitching and stamping its feet despite profound changes, whether political, financial or social in the world around it. Its digestive process has been able to swallow up reformer and critic like St. Francis of Assisi and absorb him marvelously. Many others of the saints recognized by the church would fit the same category.

The church also has a miraculous ability to accept, and even promote, diversity. Think of the various religious orders, the Jesuits, the Franciscans, and the Dominicans, each widely different from the other in outlook and function, often at war between themselves, yet united in the service of the church. The church's wide latitude for differences has permitted the founding of scores of religious orders, both for monks and nuns. And, beyond that, to permit the so-called "secular" clergy alongside the "religious". If she wishes, a girl might choose the order in which she will become a nun on the basis of the color and style of the habit she will wear. After all, they all meet the Pope's approval.

The fact that the church has succeeded in keeping within its confines hundreds of religious orders, thousands of saints between which you may freely choose for your devotion, conservatives, liberals, progressives, people who promote the distribution of the Bible and those who oppose it, charismatics and non-charismatics, those who remove the statues from their churches and others who pay out millions to promote the beatification of new saints, is certainly not a sign of weakness but of strength.

It is a well known-fact that in every religious and political crisis that has shaken Europe for centuries, the Vatican has been able to rely upon priests devoted to both sides of each question, and thus able to protect the interests of the church no matter who might come out the winner. This is demonstrated today as well, by the fact that there are priests operating full-time anti-Communist campaigns, and other priests openly professing Marxist economic doctrine. Anyone who believes that these differing opinions within the church prove that the church is falling apart, just doesn't understand the basic principles of how the church really operates.

to be continued >

IS ROMAN CATHOLICISM A RELIGION ?

Some people, perhaps the majority, believe that the Roman Catholic church is basically a religious institution, interested above all in the salvation of souls. It is their right, of course, to believe this if they wish, but many others who know the church more intimately, think that those folks have mistaken the elephant's tail for the whole elephant. The church is certainly not just a rope to get you into heaven.

No one would dream, for instance, of denying that the Roman Catholic church is a political institution. Especially because this is one of the most dearly-held claims of the Pope himself.

The Pope is political head of the Vatican City State, a 17 square-mile piece of astronomically valuable real estate in the center of Rome with its own military force, police, legal currency, and postage stamp. Of course, this little legal fiction does not correspond in any way to the Pope's real political power, but it permit him to exert his political muscle legally before the eyes of the world. This is done by means of his political organization of Papal ambassadors (called "nuncios") in the capitals of dozens of countries, not only those with Catholic governments, but Islamic, Protestant, Buddhist and atheistic. In other countries, where political situations do not permit full diplomatic relations (among them are such super-Communist countries as Albania and Bulgaria, and then also the United States), the same functions are carried out by "apostolic delegates".

Still, these are a small part of the Pope's political collaborators. In every continent, more than 1500 Catholic bishops gather, organize and forward to the Pope information on every possible situation that might interest him or affect the church's interests. They also act as transmitters and executors of the Pope's wishes, religious or political through all the clergy under their control.

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In the Vatican, the most important collaborator of the Pope is not some theological advisor, but the Secretary of State, who sees him more often and communicates with him more easily than any other person. Every morning, over the short wave facilities of Radio Vaticano, the Secretary of State sends coded messages to representatives all over the world to give him their instructions.

While the Pope's tiny state counts less than thousand citizens, all of the 600 millions of Roman Catholics in the world are spiritually responsible to follow his instructions, in which it is often difficult or impossible to distinguish spiritual or moral questions from outright politics.

In Italy itself, since the founding of the republic in 1948, the country has been under the domination of the Christian Democratic party, whose only reason for existence is to do the Church's bidding. People often say this powerful party does not seem to have any clear political ideology, but is made up of due currents, ranging from left to right.

But it is in just this way that the party can be a faithful reflection of the Roman Catholic constituency in Italy, and so is free to move in any direction, ally itself with parties on the right or left, just to protect the church's interests. And no man become Prime Minister of Italy without the Pope's approval.

Are there signs that the Roman elephant is changing, giving up its political power. No, such talk is totally without basis. The Catholic church has had its hands in politics ever since it got a foot-hold in Italy. And the talk of "historical compromise" by which the Communists return to the government will never be carried out without the Pope's approval. And when it happens it will not signal any basic change in the Vatican's long-range politics.

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ROME'S BIG BUSINESS

Nino Lo Bello, an American Roman Catholic, spent eight years in Rome as a journalist for various economic and business magazines and dedicated a lot of his time to the study of Vatican finance. His book, "The Vatican Empire" is neither an attack on the Roman Catholic Church nor a critique of its business practices. Nevertheless, it is very clear from the final paragraph of his book just how his close-up study impressed him as to correct definition of the elephant.

What brought Lo Bello to the conclusion that the real interests of the Vatican were financial, and that these would outlast the spiritual? Well, this book traces something of the history of the church's finances from near-bankruptcy after the World War I, to the greatest wind-fall in history, when Mussolini bought the Vatican's support by signing a Concordat still in effect today. Through that Concordat, Lo Bello says that "Mussolini was to do more for the Vatican than any man, any cleric, any Pope, in all history". *

What, exactly, did Mussolini do that was so important? In compensation for the conquest by Italy of the Papal States, which had happened in the past century, Mussolini gave outright to the church a sum of about US, dollar 90,000,000 in cash and another 150,000,000 in government bonds. From this modest beginning, the church has built up one of the greatest financial empires in the world.

Even though the Vatican had been avoiding all taxes on its properties and business activities for 35 years, and sympathetic government ministers said that the new taxes would not apply to the Vatican, a Socialist minister, Luigi Preti, decided to try to collect taxes in 1967, and said that the Vatican owed, by his figures, at least three billion liras of taxes.

In order to avoid taxes, and to keep from revealing its financial power, the Vatican began selling out its interests in Italian companies and re-investing overseas. Such a tremendous movement of capital required unusual means. No doubt the famous, and bankrupt, miracle financier, Michele Sindona, who bought banks in Switzerland, Germany and the U.S., although no one knew where his money came from, was one of the Vatican agents in this process. In fact, with the scandals in Sindona's U.S. bank the F.B.I. had also been investigating illegal investment in the U.S. which could have been the Vatican's.

* THE VATICAN BILLIONS by Avro Manhattan,-

see Table of Contents : Book of the Month: September 2012.

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CHARISMATICS AND ECUMENICS

According to this author, the charismatic renewal in the church is a direct result of the Second Vatican Council, and a carrying out of its decrees. "The Council is already Pentecost !" he exclaims. (Page 80). He then points out that a major preoccupation of that council was ecumenism, and adds, "Now, the charismatic renewal, which is obviously an ecumenical movement, has the merit of having faced this difficult problem and having achieved flattering, even unimaginable, results. Catholics and Protestants today are meeting in thousands of charismatic groups to pray together ... these brethren, for centuries separated by chasms of excommunications and hatred, embrace each other and then raise their arms to glorify together their common Father in heaven. They do not meet to discuss their doctrinal differences... A work of unity of heart has begun, to arrive, in a further step, to the uniformity of mind". (Pages 82-83).

We can logically ask, therefore, if the much-talked-of charismatic movement in the Catholic church is really a sign of change. It seems, on the basis of those who are spokesmen for the movement, that the answer is "No". First, because, at least for the present in Italy, the movement is very small. Second, because, even should it permeate the church, it expects no changes in structure, hierarchy or doctrine.

This has brought us to another so-called sign of change, the ecumenical desire within the Roman Catholic Church. On the international scene, *joint theological commissions* have been established between the Vatican and other churches, and various joint activities are in progress with the World Council of Churches. In U.S some local Catholic dioceses have joined the local pastoral or church councils. But what is the ecumenical outlook in Italy? What changes does it portend ?

What does the Vatican mean by the word "ecumenism" ?

"By ecumenical movement, we mean, - says the Decree on Ecumenism of the Second Vatican Council, " the activities and initiatives which, according to the various necessities of the church, and the favorable circumstances of the times, are raised up and organized for the promotion of the unity of Christians."

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" By this method, * ***little by little***, the obstacles which impede perfect ecclestical communion will be overcome.

"All Christians will unite in a single celebration of the Eucharist, in that unity of the one and only church." (p.16) .

"Baptists, Adventists and evangelicals, even though they are not yet in direct contact with the Roman Catholic Church, through the establishment of mixed commissions, are nevertheless on the way to doing so, through contacts with single groups or by means of the World Council of Churches ". (p. 87)

It would seem to me, as shocking as this may sound, that the present *ecumenical campaign* of the Roman church differs little from its purpose during the tortures and massacres of the inquisition: that is, to take advantage of the times and mentally existing today:

**- to reestablish a total control over all who
- call themselves Christians.**

In his book, " Il problema del cattolicesimo ", Professor Vittorio Subilia warns Protestants against trusting too much in words or theological definitions, in trying to understand Catholicism. He says, "It is foreseeable, without a doubt, that some of the doctrines which Protestants have been in the habit of refusing as unbiblical, will be presented tomorrow in such a biblical way that they will, at first analysis, be unrecognizable..."

These **warnings** make it amply clear that much of the so called change within the Roman church:

- *is merely the redefinition of old terms*, or the use of evangelical terms with new Roman meanings. Many simple believers, and not a few sophisticated theologians, are being completely hoodwinked by these tactics.

* In the " Year of Faith" Unfaithful to Christ and His Gospel, by Richard Bennett and Timothy F.Kauffman, they quote:

Pope Benedict XVI, at a Synod of Bishops in Rome in Oct. 2012, - repeating the words: " *little by little*..."

Read the whole article:

link. <http://www.bereanbeacon.org./>

Exerpt from A Report From Rome

Until the Pope himself has authoritatively approved the many changes which are appearing locally, until the headquarters have given new and clearly defined explanations of real doctrinal changes, then all else is froth and window-dressing. Of course, this does not mean that there are none in the Catholic church who are sincerely desirous of change, nor that there are none who are outspokenly critical of certain things within the church. But these men are NOT the CHURCH, and their opinions and initiatives are not evidence of real change, but demonstrate the constant ferment which the Church is capable of easily digesting and *eventually* forgetting.

What are some of the things a Bible-believing Christian must keep in mind, in the presence of an unchanging,yet *constantly* changing, Roman Catholic church ?

FIRST:we must remember that the sole basis of truth for the Roman Catholic church is not, has never been and can never be:

SOLA SCRIPTURA
(only Scripture),

-the inspired, written, infallible Word of GOD.

Truth is what the Church declares truth to be. St.Augustine said:"I would not believe in the Gospel if I were not brought to do so by the authority of the Catholic church."

SECOND: we must remember that according to Rome, not only truth, - but also *salvation* is mediated through the church. *Only* the Pope has authority to remit or retain sin, which he transmits to bishops and these to priests, and dispenses by means of the sacraments. TheRoman Catholic church, *has not* ever taught, *does not* teach, and can *never* teach, that man is saved by:

SOLA GRATIA
(grace alone)

- apart from his own works or merits.

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THIRD: we must remember that the Roman Catholic church has *never* taught, *does not* now teach, and can *never* teach, that the only response on the part of sinful man which GOD has decreed to the method of man's entrance into grace is:

SOLA FIDE
(faith alone)

All other changes is only window-dressing, necessary and profitable for the defence of the Roman church, but totally beside the point for those of us who have
- a Biblical faith to announce.

- *I would like to close with some very practical suggestions.*

- 1) Take advantage of every friendship and opening among Catholics, laymen or clergy, to witness lovingly
- but clearly to your faith.
- 2) Do *not* lend yourself to *ecumenical dialog*- of any type, which can only *weaken* your own position
- of testimony and *confuse* those to whom
- we must witness in all clarity,
- 3) Take a clear and helpful position with those who may profess to be truly born again within the Roman Catholic Church, as to the necessity in obedience to the LORD – and to:

- THE WORD OF GOD -

To separate completely from idolatrous and blasphemous doctrines and practices.

William C. Standridge