

When Tradition Took the Throne

How the Roman Catholic system was built, and where it departs from the Scriptures

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How Rome Rose

The church of the New Testament had no capital city, no supreme pontiff, and no throne. It had congregations — and in every congregation, a plurality of ordinary shepherds. «When they had appointed elders for them in every assembly, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord» (Acts 14:23). «I left you in Crete for this reason... appoint elders in every city» (Titus 1:5). Elders, plural, in every city; overseers who were husbands of one wife (1 Timothy 3:2); and over them all one Head, who is in heaven (Colossians 1:18). Rome appears in the New Testament as a congregation Paul writes *to* — never as an authority anyone writes *from*. Peter, whom Rome names its first pope, signs his letter «a fellow elder» (1 Peter 5:1). For roughly three centuries this body lived without power and largely under it: slandered, dispossessed, fed to beasts — and it multiplied, because its only weapons were the word, the water, and the blood of its Lamb.

Then the empire changed sides, and everything the church had survived as an enemy it did not survive as a patron. In 313 Constantine's Edict of Milan legalized the faith. In 321 the emperor — a sun-venerating politician at best half-converted — gave the church its first state-made holy day: «On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest, and let all workshops be closed» (Codex Justinianus 3.12.2, March 7, 321). Bishops began to sit where senators sat. And on February 27, 380, the emperor Theodosius issued the edict *Cunctos populos*, making Nicene Christianity the compulsory religion of the Roman state and branding all dissenters «foolish madmen... branded with the ignominious name of heretics» to be punished by imperial vengeance (Codex Theodosianus 16.1.2). Read that against the Sermon on the Mount and measure the distance already traveled: the fellowship of the crucified now defined by an emperor, enforced by magistrates, with dissent a crime. The faith had been legal for sixty-seven years and was already armed.

The bishop of Rome rose with the city's prestige, but the honest record preserves a remarkable protest from the papacy's own greatest early holder. When the patriarch of

Constantinople styled himself «universal bishop», Gregory the Great — bishop of Rome, 590 to 604 — wrote to the emperor: «*I confidently say that whosoever calls himself, or desires to be called, Universal Priest, is in his elation the precursor of Antichrist, because he proudly puts himself above all others*» (Registrum VII.33). He called the title «*execrable and profane*» and compared its ambition to Lucifer's (V.18). Gregory still claimed much for Peter's see — he was no Protestant — but the sentence stands in the record with his name under it: the greatest of the early popes branded the universal title antichristian. His successors took it anyway. Within centuries the bishops of Rome bore, without blushing, the very style Gregory had anathematized — and grander ones: Supreme Pontiff, Vicar of Christ, Holy Father — the last being the address Jesus reserved for God alone (Matthew 23:9).

What Scripture would not grant, documents were forged to supply. In the mid-eighth century there appeared the Donation of Constantine, a fabricated imperial grant in which Constantine supposedly ceded to the pope primacy over all churches and dominion over the western empire. Spread through the equally forged Pseudo-Isidorian Decretals, it entered official papal argument — Leo IX deployed it against Constantinople in 1054, the very year East and West split. In 1440 the scholar Lorenzo Valla proved from its Latin alone that it was a fake, and no serious historian since about 1600 has disputed him. The forgery did not create the papal claims, but the papal claims were content to lean on it for seven hundred years — and a throne that props itself with forgery has told you what it could not find in Scripture.

The claims themselves kept climbing. In 1302 Boniface VIII published the bull *Unam Sanctam*, which ends: «*we declare, we proclaim, we define that it is absolutely necessary for salvation that every human creature be subject to the Roman Pontiff.*» Not subject to Christ — subject to the Roman Pontiff, as a condition of salvation, for every human creature. Compare it with Acts 4:12 — «*There is salvation in none other*» — and see that a second name had been added under heaven. And in 1870, the First Vatican Council completed the arc: the pope, speaking *ex cathedra* on faith or morals, is infallible, and his definitions are irreformable «*of themselves, and not by the consent of the Church*» — with anathema pronounced on whoever dares reject the definition (*Pastor Aeternus*, ch. 4). From fellow elder to infallible monarch; from tombs in the catacombs to a sovereign state with embassies; from «I myself am also a man» to a throne no council may correct. That is the road. The chapters that follow measure each of its stations against the Scriptures both sides claim.

The Rock That Peter Named

Everything Rome claims for itself passes through one verse, so we begin there — with the verse read whole, and with Peter allowed to interpret it himself.

Matthew 16:15-18, WEB · He said to them, "But who do you say that I am?" Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God." Jesus answered him, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but my Father who is in heaven. I also tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my assembly, and the gates of Hades will not prevail against it.

Two different Greek words stand in that sentence. *You are* Petros Πέτρος^{G4074} — a stone, a piece of rock. *And on this* petra πέτρα^{G4073} — the bedrock, the rock mass. Jesus does not say «on you I will build»; He shifts the word. What had just happened in the conversation? A confession — «*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God*» — revealed not by flesh and blood but by the Father. The bedrock under the assembly is the revealed confession of who Jesus is. Peter is a stone set upon it; so is every believer who confesses the same.

That is not a Protestant spin. It is Peter's own exegesis. When the fisherman wrote his letter, he told us exactly what the building is made of and who the Rock is:

First Peter 2:4-6, WEB · coming to him, a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God, precious. You also, as living stones, are built up as a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because it is contained in Scripture, "Behold, I lay in Zion a chief cornerstone, chosen, and precious: He who believes in him will not be disappointed."

Peter says the living Stone is *Christ*, and that every believer is a living stone in the house — a *holy priesthood*, all of them. He never once in his letters calls himself the rock, the head of the church, or the bishop of bishops. He introduces himself as «*a fellow elder*» and immediately forbids the very posture the papacy would later perfect: «*neither as lording it over the charge allotted to you, but making yourselves examples to the flock*» (1 Peter 5:1-3). Paul closes the question of the foundation with a sentence that leaves no second candidate: «*For no one can lay any other foundation than that which has been laid, which is Jesus Christ*» (1 Corinthians 3:11). The household of God is «*built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief cornerstone*» (Ephesians 2:19-20) — apostles plural, prophets plural, one cornerstone, and His name is not Peter.

And the New Testament's portrait of Peter himself refuses the throne Rome built for him. He was a married man — Jesus healed *his wife's mother* (Matthew 8:14), and decades into his apostleship he still traveled with his wife (1 Corinthians 9:5). He was publicly corrected by a colleague: «*But when Peter came to Antioch, I resisted him to the face, because he*

stood condemned» (Galatians 2:11) — words impossible to write about a reigning infallible pontiff. And when a Gentile officer fell at his feet, Peter's reflex was the exact opposite of the kissed ring and the carried chair:

Acts 10:25-26, WEB · When it happened that Peter entered, Cornelius met him, fell down at his feet, and worshiped him. But Peter raised him up, saying, "Stand up! I myself am also a man."

Stand up. I myself am also a man. That is the real Peter — the fellow elder, the married fisherman, the living stone pointing every knee away from himself to the Rock he confessed. Jesus had told all twelve how authority works in His kingdom, and it reads like a prophecy against the centuries that followed: «*You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them... It shall not be so among you*» (Matthew 20:25-26). And He forbade, in advance and by name, the title the system would place at its very top: «*Call no man on the earth your father, for one is your Father, he who is in heaven*» (Matthew 23:9). The Latin for father is *papa*. The verse does not need a commentary; it needs only to be read.

One Mediator

Strip every ornament away and the Roman system is, at bottom, a system of mediation: Mary, the saints, the priest, the confessional, the sacraments — a staffed corridor between the sinner and God. Scripture describes that corridor with one sentence, and the sentence has a number in it:

First Timothy 2:5, WEB · For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus,

One. Not a chain of intercessors, not a queue of advocates, not a treasury of saints' merits to draw on. One God, one mediator, and the mediator is named. Every doctrine that inserts another figure between the sinner and the Son — however tenderly — must first delete that verse.

Consider Mary, and consider her honestly, because Scripture does honor her: the angel calls her favored, Elizabeth calls her blessed among women, and every generation rightly calls her blessed (Luke 1:48). But watch what Jesus does the one time a voice in the crowd begins the very veneration later centuries would build basilicas on:

Luke 11:27-28, WEB · It came to pass, as he said these things, a certain woman out of the multitude lifted up her voice, and said to him, "Blessed is the womb that bore you, and the breasts which nursed you!" But he said, "On the contrary, blessed are those who hear the word of God, and keep it."

On the contrary. Jesus takes the first Ave ever offered and redirects it — away from His mother's womb, toward the hearing and keeping of God's word. Mary herself pointed the same direction with the only command of hers Scripture records: «*Whatever he says to you, do it*» (John 2:5). The Marian dogmas came not from her and not from the apostles but from the centuries: her immaculate conception was defined as binding dogma in 1854, her bodily assumption in 1950 — nineteen centuries after the empty tomb, on the authority of the church alone, with no verse even claimed. A humble handmaid who called God «*my Savior*» (Luke 1:47 — the sinless need no Savior) was made Queen of Heaven by decree. The Bible knows the title «queen of heaven» from exactly one context: the idolatry Jeremiah wept over (Jeremiah 7:18).

The same test falls on the veneration of saints, relics, and images. The commandment is not ambiguous: «*You shall not make for yourselves an idol... you shall not bow yourself down to them, nor serve them*» (Exodus 20:4-5). Rome's catechisms historically resolved this by teaching a distinction between worship and veneration — and by the second commandment's quiet absorption into the first in many catechetical lists, with the tenth split in two to keep the count. But heaven itself refuses the distinction. When John — an apostle, in the Spirit — fell at the feet of a glorious heavenly being, merely to venerate:

Revelation 22:8-9, WEB · Now I, John, am the one who heard and saw these things. When I heard and saw, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel who had shown me these things. He said to me, "See you don't do it! I am a fellow bondservant with you and with your brothers, the prophets, and with those who keep the words of this book. Worship God."

See you don't do it. Twice in Revelation (19:10; 22:9) the posture is refused by the creature receiving it. Peter refused it from Cornelius (Acts 10:26). Paul warned of exactly this piety: «*Let no one rob you of your prize by a voluntary humility and worshipping of the angels*» (Colossians 2:18) — a humility that feels reverent and forfeits the prize.

And the priest in the confessional? Every believer already has what the confessional booth rations. «*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins*» (1 John 1:9) — confession runs to God, and He Himself absolves. «*Let us therefore draw near with boldness to the throne of grace*» (Hebrews 4:16) — boldness, to the throne itself, no appointment necessary. The New Testament does know a priesthood, and it names its members: «*You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood*» (1 Peter 2:9) — every believer, the whole assembly, with one High Priest over them all. When the corridor was staffed, the staff became the wall.

The Once-for-All Sacrifice

At the center of Roman worship stands the Mass — defined by the church as a true and proper sacrifice in which Christ is offered again upon the altar, His body and blood made really present in the bread and cup by the priest's consecration. The term transubstantiation entered conciliar dogma at the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215, and the Council of Trent (Session 13, 1551) definitively defined the doctrine, pronouncing anathema on any who call the Mass a bare memorial. So the question is not whether Rome honors the cross. The question is what the book of Hebrews — the Bible's own commentary on priesthood and sacrifice — does to the words *again* and *daily*. Hebrews draws the contrast with a picture: priests who stand, because their work is never done, and a Priest who sat down, because His is:

Hebrews 10:11-14, WEB · Every priest indeed stands day by day ministering and often offering the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins, but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God; from that time waiting until his enemies are made the footstool of his feet. For by one offering he has perfected forever those who are being sanctified.

One sacrifice — for ever — sat down — perfected forever. Every altar on which the offering is repeated, every tabernacle in which the victim is reserved, every priest who stands day by day, re-creates the very picture Hebrews uses for the priesthood that could never finish. The epistle presses the point again, so that no reader could miss it:

Hebrews 7:26-27, WEB · For such a high priest was fitting for us: holy, guiltless, undefiled, separated from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who doesn't need, like those high priests, to daily offer up sacrifices, first for his own sins, and then for the sins of the people. For this he did once for all, when he offered up himself.

Once for all — the Greek is *ephapax ἐφάπαξ*^{G2178}, a word Hebrews strikes like a bell (7:27; 9:12; 10:10). And the dying words of Jesus agree with the grammar: «*It is finished*» (John 19:30) — *tetelestai τετέλεσται*^{G5055}, the very form found written across settled invoices of the period: paid in full. A sacrifice that is finished cannot be continued. A debt marked paid cannot be collected again at an altar, one instalment per Mass.

From the repeated sacrifice flows the rest of the system. If the cross did not perfect the believer, something must finish the unfinished — so purgatory: a place of purifying fire after death where the faithful are cleansed, its pains shortened by Masses said, indulgences granted, and prayers purchased on behalf of the dead. It was the retail arm

of this doctrine — indulgence preaching, coins ringing in the box against years in the flames — that finally broke Christendom open in 1517. But Scripture leaves no gap for the fire to fill. «*It is appointed for men to die once, and after this, judgment*» (Hebrews 9:27) — death, then judgment; no third territory between. To the dying thief, who had no time for penance, pilgrimage, or purification, Jesus promised no process: «*Assuredly I tell you, today you will be with me in Paradise*» (Luke 23:43). Today. And John writes the verse that closes purgatory's gates forever:

First John 1:7, WEB · 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.

All sin. If the blood cleanses from all sin, the fire has nothing left to burn. Purgatory is not merely unbiblical; it is an insult dressed as devotion — it tells the Son that His finished work left a remainder, and it tells the mourner that grace, at the last, sends an invoice. By one offering He has perfected forever those who are being sanctified. The word is *forever*, and He is seated.

Another Gospel

Paul left the churches one test that outranks every claim to authority — apostolic, angelic, or papal:

Galatians 1:8-9, WEB · But even though we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you any gospel other than that which we preached to you, let him be cursed. As we have said before, so I now say again: if any man preaches to you any gospel other than that which you received, let him be cursed.

So the decisive question is not how old Rome is, how beautiful, or how large. It is whether the gospel it defines is the gospel Paul preached. Here is Paul's, in his own words:

Ephesians 2:8-9, WEB · for by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, that no one would boast.

Romans 4:5, WEB · But to him who doesn't work, but believes in him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness.

To him who doesn't work, but believes — God *justifies the ungodly* on faith alone, apart from working. Now here is the Council of Trent, Session 6, Canon 9, January 1547 — quoted in full, qualifier and all, so no one can say it was clipped: *«If any one saith, that by faith alone the impious is justified; in such wise as to mean, that nothing else is required to co-operate in order to the obtaining the grace of Justification, and that it is not in any way necessary, that he be prepared and disposed by the movement of his own will; let him be anathema.»* Weigh the two texts side by side. Paul: the ungodly one who *does not work* but believes is counted righteous. Trent: whoever says faith alone justifies the impious, without required cooperation, is accursed. Even read charitably, the canon anathematizes precisely the construal Romans 4:5 states — justification of the ungodly by believing, not working. Trent then built the alternative in the same session: justification begun in infant baptism, increased by merit, lost by mortal sin, recovered by penance, completed — for most — in purgatorial fire. That is not the same gospel refined. It is another architecture altogether, with grace as fuel and the sacramental system as the engine, and the anathema of Galatians 1 hangs over whichever of the two is the counterfeit.

The same council settled where truth may be found. In its fourth session (April 1546), Trent decreed that the church *«receives and venerates with an equal affection of piety and reverence»* — *pari pietatis affectu* — the Scriptures *and* the unwritten traditions. Two fountains, equal reverence, with the church's teaching office as the only licensed interpreter of both. Scripture answers with one line of Isaiah: *«To the law and to the testimony! if they don't speak according to this word, surely there is no morning for them»* (Isaiah 8:20). Jesus had watched tradition given equal reverence before, and He described the result: *«making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have handed down»* (Mark 7:13). The apostolic church commended the opposite reflex — the Bereans were *«more noble... examining the Scriptures daily to see whether these things were so»* (Acts 17:11): apostolic preaching itself submitted to the scroll in the hands of laymen.

And what did the system do with laymen who wanted the scroll? In 1229 the provincial Council of Toulouse — a local council, legislating for its region against the Albigenses, but with a spirit that spoke louder than its jurisdiction — decreed: *«We prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old and New Testament... but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books»* (canon 14). For centuries the pattern held: the Scriptures locked in Latin, vernacular translators hunted — William Tyndale, whose English New Testament became the bloodstream of every Bible on the English shelf, was strangled and burned in 1536 with the church's blessing. The Bereans were nobler for searching the Scriptures; the system made searching them a crime. Whatever else that is, it is not the religion of the Book it claimed to guard. A church confident that Scripture supported her would have pressed it into every hand. She chained it to the lectern — and the chain is the confession.

The Sabbath and the Claim of Authority

Of all the places where Rome's real doctrine of authority shows itself, none is more candid than the Sabbath — because here the system does not merely defend a change; it boasts of one. First, the text being handled. The Sabbath is not a rabbinic bylaw; it stands inside the Ten Words, spoken by God's own voice and grounded in creation itself:

Exodus 20:8-11, WEB · "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. You shall labor six days, and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to Yahweh your God... for in six days Yahweh made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day; therefore Yahweh blessed the Sabbath day, and made it holy.

Let it be said plainly and honestly: the New Testament itself handles the day with liberty. The first believers gathered on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7); Paul forbade anyone to sit as judge over a brother *«with respect to a feast day or a new moon or a Sabbath day, which are a shadow of the things to come; but the body is Christ's»* (Colossians 2:16-17); and Jesus declared Himself *«lord even of the Sabbath»* (Mark 2:27-28). A Christian who honors the Lord's resurrection on the first day stands in ancient and honorable company, and this chapter is not written to bind him. The deviation is not the day. The deviation is the *claim* — who has the right to touch what God spoke.

Watch the sequence. In 321, it was a Roman emperor — not an apostle — who legislated the day of rest, and he named it for his old god: *«On the venerable Day of the Sun let the magistrates and people residing in cities rest»* (Codex Justinianus 3.12.2). A generation later the Council of Laodicea (c. 363-364) turned liberty into prohibition and reversed the anathema's direction: *«Christians must not judaize by resting on the Sabbath, but must work on that day... But if any shall be found to be judaizers, let them be anathema from Christ»* (canon 29). Read it twice: a church council pronouncing anathema on Christians for resting on the day God's own commandment blessed. Whatever one's theology of the Sabbath, that canon is not liberty; it is counter-legislation against the Decalogue's own words.

And then the boast — in the system's own voice. When the Council of Trent reconvened in January 1562, the archbishop of Reggio, Gaspare de Fosso, argued in his opening address that the church's authority is demonstrated precisely by the changes she has made that Scripture never commanded — circumcision yielding to baptism, and *the Sabbath changed to the Lord's Day by the authority of the church* (Mansi 33:529-530). It was a sermon, not a decree, and it did not decide Trent's doctrine — honesty requires saying so — but the argument it wielded is the argument Rome's own catechisms went on to print for centuries. Here is one, verbatim, from a catechism published in 1910: *«Q. Which is the*

Sabbath day? A. Saturday is the Sabbath day. Q. Why do we observe Sunday instead of Saturday? A. We observe Sunday instead of Saturday because the Catholic Church, in the Council of Laodicea (A.D. 336), transferred the solemnity from Saturday to Sunday» (Peter Geiermann, *The Convert's Catechism of Catholic Doctrine*, p. 50 — a work whose own citation is twice wrong, for Laodicea sat about 363 and its canon transferred nothing, it anathematized; but the *claim* is the point). The catechism does not say God transferred the solemnity. It says *the Catholic Church* did. That is not an accusation Protestants invented; it is Rome's self-description, offered as proof of her authority.

Daniel saw a power that would arise speaking great words, and gave its signature in one clause:

Daniel 7:25, WEB · He shall speak words against the Most High, and shall wear out the saints of the Most High; and he shall think to change the times and the law; and they shall be given into his hand until a time and times and half a time.

He shall think to change the times and the law. This book does not need to press the identification; it needs only to lay the catechism beside the prophecy and let the reader see that one of them describes the other. An institution that publicly claims, as evidence of its own authority, the power to transfer what God spoke at Sinai has told you its deepest doctrine: that its voice outranks His word. Every other deviation in this book is that one, wearing a different vestment.

The New Pharisees — The Doors They Shut

Jesus reserved His most terrible woes not for pagans but for the custodians of true religion — men who sat in Moses' seat, guarded the right Scriptures, tithed the right tithes, and had turned the household of God into a checkpoint. Lay His three charges against them beside the system this book has described, and the resemblance stops being rhetorical.

The first charge: they shut the door.

Matthew 23:14, WEB · "But woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you shut up the Kingdom of Heaven against men; for you don't enter in yourselves, neither do you allow those who are entering in to enter.

Not «you fail to help men in» — you shut the Kingdom *against* them, standing in the doorway, blocking those already entering. How does an institution shut a door God opened? By replacing His entrances with its own. The Lord ordained one way in, and it

has two movements a person must make himself: *«He who believes and is baptized will be saved»* (Mark 16:16); *«Repent, and be baptized, everyone of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins»* (Acts 2:38). Believe — repent — be baptized: personal verbs, in that order, without exception in the whole book of Acts. The system re-routed all three. Faith became assent to what the church teaches; repentance became penance administered; and baptism was moved to the eighth day of life, poured on infants who can neither hear, believe, nor repent — so that hundreds of millions have been assured they already passed through a door they never walked to, and are gently prevented from ever approaching the real one. Tell a Catholic he must be born again and believe and be baptized as a believer, and it is the system itself — catechism, family, priest — that rises to block the doorway: *you were done as a baby; there is nothing to enter*. That is Matthew 23:14 operating at civilizational scale: the Kingdom shut against men by the very institution holding the handle, which does not enter the biblical way itself, and does not allow those who are entering to enter.

The second charge: they took away the key.

«Woe to you lawyers! For you took away the key of knowledge. You didn't enter in yourselves, and those who were entering in, you hindered» (Luke 11:52). The key of knowledge is the word of God in the hands of the people — and the previous chapters have already shown what was done with it: Scripture locked in a dead language, translation forbidden to the laity (Toulouse, 1229), translators burned (Tyndale, 1536), and interpretation reserved by law to the magisterium, so that even when the Book finally reached every hand, the system still claimed the sole right to say what it means. The lawyers of Luke 11 took one key from one nation for a few generations. This system held the key of a thousand nations for a thousand years.

The third charge: they bound burdens.

«For they bind heavy burdens that are grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not lift a finger to help them» (Matthew 23:4). Count the burdens laid where God laid none: celibacy imposed on clergy — marriage declared not merely forbidden them but *invalid* (Lateran II, 1139), the exact mark Paul named in advance, *«forbidding marriage»* (1 Timothy 4:3); obligatory confession of sins to a man; penances, fast-days, and holy days of obligation on pain of mortal sin; the fear of purgatory laid on every deathbed and every mourner — a burden so heavy that men paid to lighten it, and the system took the money. And meanwhile the burden God's word does lay on every soul — repent, believe, be baptized, take up the cross — is the one burden the system lifted off, having declared it accomplished in infancy. Heavy where God is light; light where God is weighty. That is the Pharisee's signature, executed with Roman thoroughness.

The old Pharisees and the new are one guild separated by vocabulary. Both sat in a seat God once honored — Moses' seat, Peter's name. Both fenced the Torah with tradi-

tion until «*you have made the commandment of God void because of your tradition*» (Matthew 15:6). Both crushed the ones entering and canonized the ones long dead. And both were loved — this must be said — both were loved by the Lord who pronounced the woes; He wept over Jerusalem's teachers as over her children, and a Pharisee named Nicodemus found the new birth by coming to Jesus at night, past his own system's watchmen. The woes are not the closing of a door. They are the sound of the Door Himself, standing in the doorway His stewards had blocked, calling over their shoulders to the crowd behind them: «*Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest*» (Matthew 11:28).

Lord, Lord — The Matthew 7 Question

Now the hardest question in this book, and it must be asked with fear, because it borrows the most severe sentence Jesus ever spoke. He described people at the final judgment — religious people, active people, people who called Him Lord with doubled intensity and could point to mighty works done in His name:

Matthew 7:21-23, WEB · Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven; but he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will tell me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, didn't we prophesy in your name, in your name cast out demons, and in your name do many mighty works?' Then I will tell them, 'I never knew you. Depart from me, you who work iniquity.'

Does the Roman system meet this profile? Test the marks one by one — the marks, not the souls, for reasons the end of this chapter will insist on.

«*Lord, Lord*» — the doubled address, the language of maximal devotion. No institution on earth says «*Lord, Lord*» more magnificently: the liturgies, the cathedrals, the canonical hours, the unbroken centuries of ceremony. The profile does not describe the irreligious. It describes the most religiously impressive people in the room.

«*In your name*» — three times. Everything the system does, it does in His name: teaches in His name, absolves in His name, crowns and anathematizes in His name, and for centuries burned in His name. The works are genuinely *in the name*. That is precisely what the verse says of the condemned. Works in the name were never the question; He does not even dispute the résumé.

«*Didn't we prophesy... cast out demons... do many mighty works?*» — and now the résumé itself must be opened, because here stands the scene's great overlooked fact: the condemned do not plead innocence. They plead *miracles*. Their own defense IS the résumé — prophecy, demons expelled, mighty works, all in His name — and the Judge

does not dispute one item of it. He answers from a different ledger entirely: *«I never knew you.»* The works are admitted into evidence and found irrelevant. And this is the one part of the profile Rome does not merely match but *advertises*. An official office of exorcism, with a Vatican-sanctioned rite, training courses in Rome, and an association of exorcist-priests counted by the hundreds whose Italian members alone report case-work by the thousands each year. Healing shrines with medical bureaus: Lourdes holds over seven thousand claimed cures on file and has itself certified about seventy as medically inexplicable. Apparitions delivering messages that have shaped the devotion of hundreds of millions — at Fatima, tens of thousands stood watching the sky. Miracles required — verified, two per cause — as the system's own machinery of canonization, a certified dossier behind every modern saint. Prophecy, demons expelled, mighty works: the triple résumé of Matthew 7:22, presented not as a hypothetical but as institutional credentials. So the question must be asked plainly: can such things really be done by people the Lord never knew — unregenerate, never baptized on any faith of their own? Scripture's answer is unnerving: yes, in both of the only two ways such works can exist. **The name can carry real authority through a false man.** Watch who is standing in this verse:

Matthew 10:1, WEB · He called to himself his twelve disciples, and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every sickness.

The twelve — and three verses later the list ends with *«Judas Iscariot, who also betrayed him»*. Judas cast out demons. Judas healed. Judas did it all genuinely *in the name* — while Jesus said of that very circle, *«Didn't I choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?»* (John 6:70). The authority travelled with the name and the commission, not with the state of the heart behind the hands. Balaam prophesied truly under the Spirit of God and died fighting God's people (Numbers 24:2); Saul prophesied among the prophets on his way to a witch's tent and a suicide's sword (1 Samuel 19:23-24). A true work through a man is no certificate for the man — still less for his institution. **And where the power is not conferred, it can be counterfeited.** The New Testament reserves its blackest warning for religious wonders at the heart of a religious system:

Second Thessalonians 2:9-10, WEB · even he whose coming is according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deception of wickedness for those who are being lost, because they didn't receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

«All power and signs and lying wonders» — worked by one who *«sits as God in the temple of God»* (2 Thessalonians 2:4), not in a casino but in a sanctuary. Jesus said the false

christs and false prophets of the last days would show «*great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the chosen ones*» (Matthew 24:24), and «*even Satan masquerades as an angel of light*» (2 Corinthians 11:14) — an angel of light is precisely what an apparition looks like. Between conferred and counterfeit, Scripture does not require us to adjudicate each shrine and each rite — because Moses was given the test that makes the adjudication unnecessary:

Deuteronomy 13:1-3, WEB · If there arise in the midst of you a prophet, or a dreamer of dreams, and he give you a sign or a wonder, and the sign or the wonder come to pass, of which he spoke to you, saying, Let us go after other gods, which you have not known, and let us serve them; you shall not listen to the words of that prophet, or to that dreamer of dreams: for Yahweh your God proves you, to know whether you love Yahweh your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Read it slowly: the sign *comes to pass* — granted, stipulated, real — and the prophet is still false, because the test was never the wonder but the *direction*. Where does the sign send you? An apparition whose messages send souls to a co-mediatrix and her rosary; a shrine that anchors hope in waters and relics; wonders that consecrate the very system that keeps the cup from the laity and the Scriptures, for centuries, from the plow-boy — run the Deuteronomy 13 test and the résumé collapses *whether or not the wonders are real*. God, says Moses, permits the fulfilled sign as a proving: *does this people love me, or the wonder?* And for the name wielded without the knowing, Scripture supplies its own grim comedy: «*Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are you?*» (Acts 19:15) — the demons keep more honest records than the résumé does. And the great pile itself? Sort it honestly and Scripture has a bin for every part of it. Some of it is genuine — the Lord knows those who are His inside every fold (2 Timothy 2:19), and He honors faith in His name wherever it is found (Mark 9:39). But let no one turn that concession into a license, because to those very ones the voice from heaven addresses its command: «*Come out of her, my people, that you have no participation in her sins*» (Revelation 18:4) — being genuinely His does not sanctify remaining; it is precisely why the summons applies. A born-again man who stays and serves the machinery lends his regenerate hands to it: every mass he says, every infant he sprinkles, every absolution he pronounces teaches souls to trust the system instead of the Savior — and a man can be truly known by the Lord and still mislead many, for even Peter at Antioch, by one wrong standing, «*carried away*» Barnabas and the rest into his hypocrisy until Paul withstood him to the face (Galatians 2:11-13). Obedience to the system is disobedience to the summons, and the misleading follows as surely as the shadow. Most of the pile is neither miracle nor demon: Lourdes' own bureau rejects more than ninety-nine of every hundred claimed cures, and the exorcists themselves concede that most of their casework is illness, not possession — «*those who are healthy have no*

need for a physician, but those who are sick do» (Matthew 9:12). And some of it belongs to the category Paul named: lying wonders. But the verse requires no census of the pile — stipulate every wonder in it as real, and *«I never knew you»* still stands, because Jesus grants the works in the very sentence that damns the workers. One honesty must guard this edge. The nameless exorcist of Mark 9:38-39 cast out demons in the name while walking outside the apostles' own circle, and Jesus said *«Don't forbid him»*. So the line does not run between inside-the-institution and outside it — that is the whole point. Judas stood inside the innermost circle and was lost; the stranger stood outside it and was defended. Neither membership nor miracle decides anything, in either direction. What decides is the mark this profile ends with — being *known* — and to that mark the résumé now yields.

«You who work iniquity» — the Greek is anomia ἀνομία^{G458}, lawlessness: activity unbound from God's law. And here the verse becomes surgical, because Jesus defined this exact operation when He faced the system of His own day: *«making void the word of God by your tradition, which you have handed down»* (Mark 7:13), *«in vain do they worship me, teaching as doctrine rules made by men»* (Matthew 15:9). Worship — vain. Works — abundant. The word of God — set aside by the tradition that claimed to serve it. A church that forbids what Scripture blesses (marriage, to its clergy), commands what Scripture forbids (bowing to images), repeats what Scripture finished (the sacrifice), inserts what Scripture excludes (mediators between God and men), and reserves to itself what Scripture gives every believer (the word, the cup, the priesthood, absolution) is doing anomia in the technical, Matthew-7 sense — not the absence of religious law, but the displacement of God's law by its own.

«I never knew you» — and here is the center. The verb is ginōskō γινώσκω^{G1097}, the covenant knowing, the Greek heir of the Hebrew yada — not information, but relationship. This is the mark that decides everything, and it is the one no institution can possess or dispense, because yada is by nature person-to-person. A system that tells a soul it was regenerated as an infant by water it cannot remember, kept in grace by sacraments administered ex opere operato — by the mere working of the rite — and may hope, at best, to die in a state of grace, has built salvation entirely out of the one material Matthew 7 burns: religious activity in His name, with the question of being *known by Him* never personally faced. The system does not merely fail to require the new birth; it teaches its members that the machinery has already handled it. That is how a soul arrives at the last day with a full sacramental record and an empty *ginōskō* — «Lord, Lord» on the lips, and no acquaintance behind it.

So: does Rome meet the Matthew 7:23 requirement? The *system* matches the profile mark for mark — the doubled Lord, the works in the name, the anomia of tradition enthroned over the word, and a mechanism that lets a life pass from cradle to grave without ever once asking, *does He know me?* But Matthew 7 is not addressed to systems, and

it permits no man to pronounce it over another. It is addressed to *«everyone who says to me, Lord, Lord»* — one soul at a time, the reader included, the writer included. There are Catholics who have been truly born again and know Him — the Lord knows those who are His (2 Timothy 2:19) inside every fold, and He had a Nicodemus even in the Sanhedrin. The verse is not a verdict for us to throw; it is a mirror the system forbids its people to look into. This book exists to hold up the mirror. The Pharisee of Luke 18 prayed in the right temple, with the right theology of tithes and fasts, and went home unjustified; the tax collector, with no system at all, *«God, be merciful to me, a sinner»*, went home justified (Luke 18:13-14). The difference was never the institution. It was the mercy, personally begged and personally received — the beginning of being known.

Come Out, and Come Home

This book has been hard on a system and it will not apologize for that, because the system stands between souls and their God. But the last chapter belongs not to the system — it belongs to you, if you are inside it, or leaving it, or grieving someone lost inside it. Heaven's own voice gives the direction:

Revelation 18:4, WEB · I heard another voice from heaven, saying, "Come out of her, my people, that you have no participation in her sins, and that you don't receive of her plagues,

Mark whose voice it is and whom it addresses: *my people* — God has people to call out, which means He has people within. The call is not to despise them; it is to join them on the way out. And the way out is not a better institution. Protestantism has its own dead formalisms, its own Laodiceas. The way out is a Person, and He described Himself as a door, not a system:

John 14:6, WEB · Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father, except through me.

Everything the system sold, He gives. It offered absolution through a priest; He says *«If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us the sins»* (1 John 1:9) — directly, tonight, no booth. It offered grace through sacraments; the word says *«by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works»* (Ephesians 2:8-9). It offered Mary's tenderness; He wept over Jerusalem and ran to meet prodigals — the tenderness was His all along. It offered purgatory's slow purification; the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses from *all* sin (1 John 1:7). It offered a Queen of Heaven to ask; He says come yourself, *«with boldness to the throne of grace»* (Hebrews 4:16).

There is nothing in the corridor worth keeping once you have met the One the corridor was blocking:

Acts 4:12, WEB · There is salvation in none other, for neither is there any other name under heaven, that is given among men, by which we must be saved!”

So do what the system never asked of you. Come to Him yourself — not through a priest, not with a saint’s card, but as the tax collector came: *God, be merciful to me, a sinner*. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ — that He died for your sins and rose bodily, once for all — and you will be saved (John 3:16). Then be baptized on your own confessed faith, as every convert in the book of Acts was: hear, believe, go down into the water — the believer’s burial and resurrection with Christ, not the christening of an infant who could neither hear nor believe. And then get to know Him — the daily, personal, covenant knowing that no rite can administer and no institution can revoke: «*This is eternal life, that they should know you, the only true God, and him whom you sent, Jesus Christ*» (John 17:3).

I have written the whole path out, step by step, in two books that belong together: [Born Again](#) — what Jesus meant by «*ye must be born again*», and how a soul comes to be known by Him — and [Believe and Be Baptized](#) — what the risen Lord commanded about the water, straight from the Scriptures the tradition set aside. The door is open. It was never locked from His side. «*Him who comes to me I will in no way throw out*» (John 6:37).

How this was made

This is the author's own work. It was composed with **junifye** and an AI assistant, drawing its Scripture and original-language work (Greek, Hebrew, cross-references) from **Darash** (Hebrew *darash*, “to seek, inquire, study”), a tool and reference work for the Bible in its original languages.

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