

**DISCUSSING
OUR
DIFFERENCES**

by

**JOHN PAUL BELANGER,
ROMAN CATHOLIC**

&

**JOHN WADDEY,
CHURCH OF CHRIST**

CONTENTS

- I. **Waddey's First Article:** A Trip to Jerusalem, Discussing Original Christianity. P. 1
- II. **Belanger's Opeing Letter:** A Catholic Perspective on the Original Church.. P. 2
- III. **Waddey's First Reply:** Catholic Dogma Rests on Unfounded Assumptions. P. 2
- IV. **Belanger's Second Letter:** Misconceptions About the Catholic Church. P. 3
- V. **Waddey's Second Reply:** Determining God's Will on Baptism; Illumination by the Holy Spirit. P. 4
- VI. **Belanger's Third Letter:** The Final Authority Rests with the Pope, not the Bible. P. 5
- VII. **Waddey's Third Reply:** The Head of the Church; the Development of the New Testament. P. 5
- VIII. **Belanger's Fourth Letter:** Silence of the Scripture; Sola Scriptura; How Are We to Interpret the Bible? Contraception. P. 6
- IX. **Waddey's Fourth Reply:** Inherited Sin and Infant Baptism; Interpreting the Bible; Biblical Authority and Traditions. P. 8
- X. **Belanger's Fifth Letter:** Don't All Churches Have an Earthly Head? Transubstantiation; Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches. P. 9
- XI. **Waddey's Fifth Reply:** Church Polity; In vitro Fertilization; Adamic Sin; Real Presence in the Mass; Birth Control. P. 10
- XII. **Belanger's Sixth Letter:** Is the Bible Alone Sufficient for Ones Faith? Abortion; Catholic View of Sexuality. P. 12
- XIII. **Waddey's Sixth Reply:** Church of Christ Contrasted with Other Protestant Bodies; Church of Christ and Catholic Attitude Toward the Bible; Birth Control. P. 13
- XIV. **Belanger's Seventh Letter:** Cultural Catholics; the Sacred Canon; Birth Control. P. 14
- XV. **Waddey's Seventh Reply:** The Canon; The Bible is not Dependent on the Church of Rome; Two Views of the Church; Celibacy; Sexual Perversions. P. 16
- XVI. **Belanger's Eighth Letter:** The Wealth of the Catholic Church; Contraception and Celibacy; Transubstantiation. P. 17
- XVII. **Waddey's Eighth Reply:** Origin of the Church in Rome; Worldly Treasure of the Catholic Church; What Christ's Church is; The Meaning of Matt. 16:18; How the Church Spreads and Grows; Forbidding Marriage; The Real Presence in the Mass. P. 18
- XVIII. **Belanger's Ninth Letter:** Peter in Rome; Primacy of Peter; Church's Wealth; Immorality or Marriage; Transubstantiation; Justin Martyr and the Mass. P. 20
-

XIX. Waddey's Ninth Reply: Peter's Role in the Early Church. Matt. 16:16-20 Explained; Church and Material Wealth; Papal Infallibility; Schisms in Catholic Church; Celibacy; Real Presence; Church of Christ is no Denomination; The Goal of Church of Christ. P. 21

XX. Belanger's Tenth Letter: Marriage and Celibacy; The Realm of Papal Infallibility; Priestly Problems; The Church's Image-Problem; Mass. P. 23

XXI. Waddey's Tenth Reply: The New Testament, Our Book of Doctrine; Veneration of and Mediation of Departed Saints; Celibacy; Infallibility. P. 25

XXIII. Belanger's Eleventh Letter: Intercessory Prayer to Saints; Eucharist. P. 26

XXIV. Waddey's Eleventh Reply: Intercessory Prayer and Mediators; Sacred Images, Idolatry; Christ the One Mediator. P. 27

XXV. Belanger's Twelfth Letter: Enforced Celibacy; The Role of Images; Do Early Christian Writers Support Your View? P. 28

XXVI. Waddey's Twelfth Reply: Enforced Celibacy; Two Different Approaches to Biblical Authority; Intercession and Mediation; Early Christian Writers. P. 29

XXVII. Belanger's Thirteenth Letter: Celibacy; Images; The Bible Alone Cannot be Understood by All; The Mistake of Protestants. P. 30

XXVIII. Waddey's Thirteenth Reply: Celibacy; Prayers and Sacred Images; Praying to Departed Saints; Infant Baptism; Baptism and Circumcision; Seeing the Bible Alike; Catholic Schisms. P. 31

XXIV. Belangers Fourteenth Letter: Celibacy, Images, Intercessory Pryaers, The Authority of the Bible, Dissenters. P. 33

XXV. Waddey's Fourteenth Reply: Celibacy; Man-made Laws; Customs; The Cherubim; Apostolic Succession, Catholics and the Bible; Church Shoppers; Purgatory and the State of the Dead; Mary the Mother of God. P. 35

XXVI. Belanger's Fifteenth Letter: Apostolic Succession; Authority in Catholicism; Sola Scriptura; Origin of Catholic Practices; Canon of Old Testament; Purgatory; Mary the Mother of God. P. 37

XXVII. Waddey's Fifteenth Reply: Apostolic Succession; Our New Testament is All-sufficient; the New Testament Canon; The Authority of the New Testament; Christians and the Old Testament; Baptism and Circumcision; Old Testament Canon and Apocrypha; Purgatory; Mary the Mother of God. P. 39

XXVIII. Belanger's Sixteenth Letter: Catholic View of Religious Authority; Sola Scriptura; Is the Old Testament Still in Force? Priestly Vestments; Using Pagan Customs and Practices. P. 41

XXIX. Waddey's Sixteenth Reply: Oral Traditions; Apostolic Succession; Authority; Can the Bible Alone Save a Sinner? Triune Nature of God; The Nature of Christ; The Role of Teachers; How Canonicity was Determined,;The Role of the Old Testament in Our Faith; Priestly Vestments; Origins of Christmas. P. 43

XXX. Belanger's Seventeenth Letter: Can Man be Saved by Obeying Bible's Teaching? Catholic Church; the Fullest Form of Christianity; Church Councils; Mary the Mother of God; The Bible and the Living Voice of the Church; Alleged Bible Contradictions; Vestments; How Many Apostles? Contraception. P. 45

XXXI. **Waddey's Seventeenth Reply:** Contraception and Family Planning; Interpreting the Bible; Apparent Contradictions in Bible; Mary the Mother of God; Trinity; Truth in Religion; Can Sinners be Saved Without the Gospel? P. 46

XXXII. **Belanger's Eighteenth Letter:** Contraception; Onan's Case; What Does it Mean to Follow Jesus? Interpreting the Bible in a Vacuum; Mary the Mother of God; The Bible Only and Minimalism; Can Primitive Man be Saved in His Ignorance? Once Saved Always Saved. P. 48

XXXIII. **Waddey's Eighteenth Reply:** Once Saved Always Saved; The Nature of Saving Faith; "Christian" Defined; Can One be Saved Outside of Christianity? Must the Catholic Church Interpret the Bible? Mary as Mother of God; Is Man Equipped to Understand the Bible? Being Like Jesus; Contraception; Onan's Case. P. 50

XXXIV. **Belanger's Nineteenth Letter:** Saving Faith, Indulgences; Faith Only; Definition of "Christian;" Christianity Before the Popes; Man Needs a Teacher to Explain the Bible; Visible Church; Mary the Mother of God; Sacrifice of the Mass; Contraception. P. 52

XXXV. **Waddey's Nineteenth Reply:** Reference Books for Bible Study; Contraception, Mary and Jesus; The Nature of Christ's Church; The Gospel Necessary for Man's Salvation; Sola Scriptura Defined; The Bible and the Church Predate Catholicism; Christian Baptism; Saved by Grace; Indulgences. P. 54

XXXVI. **Belanger's Twentieth Letter:** Contraception; Mary and Jesus; Salvation and the Church; Sola Scriptura; The Nature of Christian Baptism; Indulgences. P. 56

XXXVII. **Waddey's Twentieth Reply:** Purgatory; Baptism; We Look to Scripture; The Nature of Christ; Sola Scriptura; Can Man be Saved With the Gospel? Adoration of Mary; Contraception. P. 57

XXXVIII. **Belanger's Twenty-first Letter:** Purgatory; Prayers for the Dead; Mode of Baptism; Mary and Jesus; Catholics Leaders are Guided by the Holy Spirit; How Faith is Achieved; Mary; Contraception. P. 59

XXXIX. **Waddey's Twenty-first Reply:** God's Truth is Revealed; Contraception; Adoration of Mary; Are Catholic Bishops Led by the Holy Spirit? Things Necessary to Salvation; Baptism by Immersion; Purgatory. P. 61

XL. **Belanger's Twenty-second Letter:** Ignatius; Transubstantiation; Church Fathers; Contraception; Mary; Catholic and Orthodox Differences; Catholic View of Authority; Faith and Baptism Not Absolutely Essential to Salvation. P. 62

XLI. **Waddey's Twenty-second Reply:** Why People are Lost; Changes in Catholicism; Catholic Church has Internal Differences; Orthodox Church; Mary's Adoration; Contraception; Church Fathers and Apostasy; Real Presence. P. 64

XLII. **Belanger's Twenty-third Letter:** Can Those in Heathen Darkness be Saved? Thief on the Cross; The Orthodox Church; Transubstantiation; Cessation of Miracles; Purgatory; Mortal and Venial Sins. P. 65

XLIII. **Waddey's Twenty-third Reply:** Major and Minor Sins; Purgatory; Biblical and Catholic Miracles; Infallibility; Orthodox Church Beliefs; Can Man be Saved in Ignorance of God? Thief on the Cross. P. 67

XLIV. **Belanger's Twenty-fourth Letter:** Deadly and Other Sins; Purgatory; Apocryphal Books; Miracles; Persecution and Infallibility; Salvation of Those Who Know Not Christ; Instrumental Music; Do Apostolic Fathers Support Your View? P. 68

XLV. **Waddey's Twenty-fourth Reply:** Origins of Christmas; The New Testament is Christ's Will and Testament; Instruments of Music in Worship; How God's Makes His Will Known; Corrupt Popes; Miracles; Purgatory; Apocryphal Books. P. 70

XLVI. Belanger's Twenty-fifth Letter: Christmas and Holy Days; Apostolic Fathers; Christ's Will and Testament; Instruments of Music in Worship; Salvation of Those in Spiritual Darkness; Sinful Popes; Miracles, His View of I Cor. 13:10; Purgatory; Septuagint. P. 71

XLVII. Waddey's Twenty-fifth Reply: The Septuagint; The Original Text of the Bible; Development of the Old Testament Canon; Praying for the Dead; Purgatory and Suffering; I Cor. 13:10 and the Secession of Miracles; God Works in Three Ways; Authority of the Bible in Catholicism; Church Fathers; Holy Days. P. 73

XLVIII. Belanger's Twenty-sixth Letter: Catholic View of Authority; Sola Scriptura; Original Sin; The Old Testament Canon; Praying for the Dead; Purgatory; Miracles; Church Fathers; Transubstantiation. P. 75

XLIX. Waddey's Twenty-sixth Reply: Real Presence and Figurative Language; If the Worshipers Eat the Real Flesh and Blood of Jesus; The Church Fathers; Purgatory; Miracles; Sola Scriptura; What Early Christian Said Regarding the Bible; Paul's Traditions; Original Sin; Baptismal Regeneration. P. 77

L. Belanger's Twenty-Seventh Letter. Eucharist and Mystery; Literal or Figurative Meaning; How Left-over Wine and Bread are Handled; Real Presence; Sacramental Presence of Jesus and Cannibalism; Baptismal Regeneration. P. 79

Conclusion

DISCUSSING OUR DIFFERENCES

JOHN PAUL BELANGER, ROMAN CATHOLIC
&
JOHN WADDEY, CHURCH OF CHRIST

(This interesting series of letters began when Mr. John Belanger chanced to find and read the following article which I had written and published . JHW)

A TRIP TO JERUSALEM

Christianity began in Jerusalem. It's birthday was the Pentecost Sunday following the resurrection of Christ. The sacred historian, sketched us a thrilling picture of those early days in the Book of Acts of Apostles. If we could take one of those imaginary time tunnels and visit the church in Jerusalem in the first century we would see pure, unadulterated Christianity as it came from the hand of Christ. It bears little resemblance to much of what is seen today.

- * You would find only one kind of church, Christ's church (Matt. 16:18; I Cor. 12:12-13). No denominations existed. No one wore the names of great preachers, particular doctrines, notable cities or nations. The disciples were called Christians (Acts 11:26).
- * You would find no pope nor patriarch, no president nor general overseer presiding over the church. Christ was head over all things to his church (Eph. 1:22).
- * You would find no infant members. Only those who believed received baptism (Mk. 16:16).
- * You would see no baptismal founts for sprinkling because in those days baptism was administered by immersion. Converts went down into the water, were buried with Christ and then raised up in the likeness of his resurrection (Acts 8:38-39; Rom. 6:4).
- * You would see no women preachers or bishops in that church. The apostles suffered not a woman to teach nor have authority over the men (I Tim. 2:12).
- * There would be no images, incense, prayer beads or holy water in that church. Such things came many years later after the apostles of Christ were all dead and gone.
- * There would be no bands, or professional musicians to entertain, nor musical instruments in their worship. Eleven hundred years would pass before instrumental music became accepted in churches. They sang and made melody in their hearts (Eph. 5:19).
- * There would be no reverends or holy fathers. Jesus forbade his people from wearing such religious titles (Matt. 23:8-9). They were all brethren.

You can experience that same kind of original Christianity today. Visit a **Church of Christ** near you. **John Waddey**

JOHN BELANGER'S OPENING LETTER

John--Greetings in Christ! I came across a copy of "Christianity: Then and Now" from 2005 (Vol. 4 no. 12) and read it with great interest.

I heartily agree that it is sad that there are so many divisions among Christianity today. Not only does this division hurt our universal mission of spreading the Gospel, but it goes against the intention of Our Lord (John 17:21). In your newsletter that I read, I was especially interested in "A Trip to Jerusalem" on the back page. May I offer a Catholic perspective on these items?

First, it is true that there was only one church, with no denominations. This was the universal Christian church, which continues to this day. Many reformers over the years have broken away from this Church, which is why there are so many denominations! Jesus promised to guide the continuous Church and prevent it from teaching error (see the last verse in Matthew's Gospel).

Second, it is not true that one would find no pope or patriarch. Peter was the first pope! (See Matthew 16:18. This refers to Peter the man, not just his confession of faith. I would be glad to engage in a friendly discussion about the translation of **petros/petra**.)

Third, it is true that baptisms were performed by immersion. (Believe it or not, this is still the preferred method in Catholic baptism). But that certainly does not invalidate other forms of baptism, such as pouring over the head. Just because something was done a particular way does not mean other methods are wrong. Otherwise, all Christian men today would have beards and speak Aramaic, simply because that's how the early Christians did things! This would also apply to your comment about not having images, prayer beads, musical instruments, etc.

Fourth, many Christians misinterpret Matthew 23:9. One must look at all of Scripture in context, not simply "proof texting". If Jesus intended for no one to ever be called Father, why does Paul seem to refer to himself that way (1 Cor. 4:15) and John uses that exact word when speaking to others in the Christian community (1 John 2:14).

I have always admired the Church of Christ for its attempt to get back to the original Christian practices and beliefs. But without successors to the Apostles, who is to decide what those beliefs and practices should be? If one claims that the Bible is the only authority, that raises the obvious question of who decided which books belong in the Bible. It was the Catholic bishops (A.D. 396).

Sorry this is such a long email! I would be glad to hear your response to my comments. In a true Christian spirit, we could correspond in a friendly manner regarding these differences.

Peace, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S FIRST REPLY

Dear John B: Thank you for taking time to write. I am pleased that you took time to read my little paper. I might mention that it is addressed primarily to ministers and elders of churches of Christ regarding internal problems we are currently facing.

In your response to my piece, "A Trip to Jerusalem," you build your case on a series of unfounded assumptions.

* You assume that the original, undivided church in Jerusalem was the Roman Catholic Church. There is very little in the Catholic Church that is identical with that first church. The gospel did not reach Rome until many years later. No Roman bishop was viewed as the universal head of the church for some 500 years.

* It is true that many tried to reform the Catholic church and failing to do so, broke away and started their own "protest" churches...now known as Protestants. The question is why were they so driven to reform the Roman Catholic church

if she were free from error as you suggest? The recent scandals in the priesthood, which went on unchecked for years, shows that your church is not free from error. Even the more devout members of the Roman Catholic church saw the need for reform and launched the "Counter-Reformation" in order to correct their internal decay. The same was true of the late John XXIII and his reformation.

* You assume that "Jesus promised to guide the (RC) church and prevent it from teaching error." Matthew 28:20, "Lo I am with you always" does not say this! Note that Paul told the elders of the Ephesian church that from among themselves men would arise speaking perverse things to draw away disciples. If Christ had promised to "prevent" the teaching of error by the church...the church consists of people...then Christ failed to do what you think he promised to do.

* You assume that Peter was the first pope. Peter was married. Peter sinned and was rebuked by Paul (Gal. 2:11-12). He was never addressed as their superior by any of the apostles. No record of him occupying a supreme position is mentioned in the New Testament. There is no proof that he was ever a bishop of the church in Rome. The passage in Matt. 16:18 does not clearly declare Peter to be the rock on which the church was built. In fact Paul clearly states that "other foundation (this would include Peter) can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (I Cor. 3:11). Was Paul correct in saying this? If you insist that Peter is the foundation of the church then you are implying that Paul was mistaken in that which he wrote.

* You concede that baptism as taught by Christ and his apostles and practiced by the first Christians was by immersion in water. You then assume that you can baptize people in other ways (sprinkling, pouring) of which the Bible does not speak...thus are not authorized by God. You then proceed to extend this assumption to all the other practices accumulated by the Roman Catholic Church through the ages (beads, candles, incense, images, etc.). You are selective in your application of this idea. For example you believe that Christ wanted the church to have a pope. But you say, "Just because something was done a particular way does not mean other methods are wrong." So you could not say it is wrong for a church to exist without recognizing a pope. You could not object to a married priesthood, or female bishops and priests. Could you?

* You assume that you can do what God's forbids and still be pleasing to Him and expect to receive his blessing. To bow before graven images is clearly forbidden (Ex. 20:4-5). Yet you do that. To call a man Father in a religious sense is plainly forbidden (Matt. 23:9). Yet you do that. If you can disobey God in these matters and still be pleasing, cannot others disobey him in still other matters and be pleasing. Your position implies that God's will and his word are without meaning; that to defy God is without consequence.

* In trying to escape Christ's prohibition of calling religious leaders "Father," you cite passages that use the word in a different context and with a different meaning. Paul was like a father in that he had planted the gospel seed that produced the Corinthian church. John addressed the different age groups among those to whom he wrote. There were young men, little children and fathers. These fathers were those who were not little children or young men. Hence they were older, mature men. The objection is not to having or being a fleshly father or an old man, but to addressing our religious leaders as our spiritual "Fathers."

I do hope these thoughts are sufficiently clear and that you will find them of some value. I am

Yours in the hope of heaven, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S SECOND LETTER

Thanks for your reply about the differences in Catholic vs. other Christians. Of course I can't expect us to agree on all these things (the various denominations have been having these same discussions for 500 years!), but allow me to point out a few misconceptions you seem to have about the Catholic Church.

Yes, of course Peter was married (we read about his mother-in-law), but that has nothing to do with him being pope. Many popes in the early years were probably married. The celibacy requirement for priests nowadays is not an unchangeable doctrine, but what we call a discipline. In fact, a few Catholic priests today are married, by special dispensation (for various reasons). And throughout Acts, Peter is clearly the leader of the Apostles.

Secondly, when we proclaim that the Church teaches no error, we by no means say that church leaders are impeccable. Certainly priests and bishops and even many popes have been terrible sinners through the centuries. But official

teachings of the Church about faith and morals are said to be error-proof. Please note the distinction between official teachings and individual Christians.

Third, Catholics do not worship images! That would indeed be a violation of the Ten Commandments. But we do hold them as special reminders of Jesus and holy Christians who have gone before us. If I had a picture of my wife and children on my desk, would that mean that I worship the picture? No -- they are images of those I love (and in the case of Jesus, I would say worship; but not for saints).

I have heard these misconceptions before, so I just wanted to clarify them. (And I probably have some misconceptions about Protestants, too!)

Finally, I have an honest question. If one Bible-based Protestant church teaches a certain belief (say infant baptism, for instance) and another Bible-based church down the road teaches the opposite, who is right? They can both read the Scriptures and make a plausible case for each side, but logic says they can't both be right. Is the Holy Spirit guiding one pastor to the correct interpretation? How do we know who that is? I would say this is where unity under one shepherd is critical.

Thanks again for your reply.

Peace in Christ,
John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S SECOND REPLY

Dear John B: Thank you for your honest question. The answer is much simpler than you think. When a question such as infant baptism is raised, it really does not matter what either preacher might say about it. The only thing that matters is, "What does the Bible say?" Isaiah says it well. When a question arose about consulting mediums for information the prophet said, "To the law and to the testimony! If they speak not according to this word, surely there is not morning (i.e. light) for them" (Is. 8:20). When we turn to God's word we discover the following about baptism:

* He that believeth and is baptized (Mark 16:16). Baptism is for believers, but infants cannot believe, therefore baptism is not for them.

* Repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of your sins (Acts 2:38). Infants are incapable of repenting. Also, they have no sins of which to repent. Therefore baptism is not for infants.

* There are numerous Bible examples of adults being baptized, but none of infants being baptized. The practice of infant baptism is without bible authority. It is a practice built upon an unfounded assumption.

It is another assumption to suggest that we cannot arrive at a common understanding of what the Bible says. Men knowledgeable in certain subjects write books on which others can agree. For example there are books of weights and measurements. If the question is the number of ounces in a half gallon container, we simply consult a recognized reference book to determine the answer. There we find that there are 64 ounces in a liquid half gallon. It would be foolish to dispute the fact. The same principle is true when seeking answers to biblical questions. On the subject of baptism the Bible clearly speaks. It is reserved for sinners who are mature enough to believe in Christ, repent of their sins, confess his name (Rom. 10:9-10) and act on their own initiative (Acts 8:37). Lack of respect for God's Word causes men to reject clear biblical teaching.

The Holy Spirit does not provide special divine guidance and illumination today. He did that in the apostolic age while the New Testament was being compiled. When the perfect Word of God was available to man that supernatural enlightenment ceased (I Cor. 13:8-11). If the Holy Spirit must tell us how to understand the Bible, why should we waste our time reading that sacred book? We would simply ask the Holy Spirit for the correct information.

One other thought. If God is all wise and all powerful, surely He is capable of writing a book that man could understand. If we say that the Bible is a book with an unclear and confusing message then we cast aspersions on the author thereof.

If having a pope is designed to give us a uniform understanding of God's will, how then do you explain that across the centuries different popes have expressed different views about God's Will? Why is it necessary to convene Councils to discuss and debate controversial topics? Why do we find many contradictory views held and taught by Catholics today? For example: married priests, abortion, women priests, etc.

I hope these thoughts are adequate for your question.
Have a wonderful day. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S THIRD LETTER

I do agree with much of what you have said, but I could make a case for infant baptism (whole households were baptized according to Acts -- see, it's how we interpret the passage). But I'll let that one rest.

I guess my main point is that the Bible has not always been the sole authority, for the simple reason that the New Testament did not exist until the 4th century. So until that time, what did the early Christians rely on? Those whose authority derived from the Apostles.

Catholics say that the pope is the visible head on earth, but Jesus is the true head of the Roman Catholic Church (John 15:5). When Our Lord ascended into heaven, He did not leave the believers with authority in the form of a book to be interpreted. He gave authority to the Apostles. Popes have never disagreed with each other about teachings on faith and morals. They have disagreed -- and sometimes erred -- in other areas, such as political persecutions, whether the Church must always use Latin, etc.

Finally, you say that many contradictory views are held today by Catholics about various topics. Again I would say that if those topics relate to faith or morals, then there ought not be any disagreement. Any Catholic who thinks abortion should be legal is way out of line. I am disgusted by certain politicians (especially 2 senators from Massachusetts, one of whom recently ran for president) who claim to be Catholic and pro-choice. They give all Catholics a bad name! And women (in the) priesthood has been definitively addressed as not allowable. Same for homosexuality. I think that most dissenters from these authoritative teachings are "cultural Catholics" who don't follow Christ's teachings but call themselves Catholic on the opinion polls.

So again, thanks for your reply. I know you're a busy guy, so I hope I have not taken too much of your time. I am willing to continue correspondence, but I'll leave it up to you. I know we are both trying to do the Lord's will, and I hope all Christians pray for unity.

In Him, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S THIRD REPLY

Dear John B: Thanks for your cordial spirit and your interest in spiritual things. It is productive past-time when honest minds search for God's truth and will for their lives.* If you make your case for infant baptism by appealing to the baptism of households as mentioned in the Book of Acts, you build your house on the sandy foundation of assumption. The Holy Spirit did not inspire Luke to mention infants among those baptized. You must assume that they had small children in their home and that those small children were baptized along with their adult parents.

* If the Catholic church has Christ and the pope as her heads, then she has two heads. Yet Paul clearly states that Christ is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22). The church is the spiritual body of Christ. If the Catholic church has both Christ and the pope as her heads, then the church was be like a monstrosity...for that is how we would view any body with two heads. Never does the New Testament scripture speak of the church having an earthly, mortal head.

* You state that "the Bible has not always been the sole authority, for the simple reason that the New Testament did not exist until the 4th century." Then you ask, "So until that time, what did the early Christians rely on?"

* The Thessalonian Epistles and Galatians are thought to have been the earliest of our books of Scripture. They are variously dated at ca. 48-54 AD. Matthew's gospel was written ca. 60 A.D. John penned his three epistles and the Book of Revelation in the last decade of the first century. These and the other books were considered special since they came from those who were apostles or those closely associated with them in the apostolic period. They were circulated widely among the churches even while the apostles lived. When Paul sent his epistles to the Colossians, he exhorted "When this epistle hath been read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans; and that ye also read the epistle from Laodicea" (Col. 4:16). Peter who died in ca. 64 A. D. wrote in his second letter, "even as our beloved brother Paul also, according to the wisdom given to him, wrote unto you; as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things...."(II Pet. 3:15-16). From this we learn that the apostolic writings were circulated among the churches and that Paul's epistles were known to exist as a collection of writings. I am sure that you are aware that the Muratorian Canon, which is dated at ca. 200 A.D., shows that the writings were collected, circulated and recognized as authoritative in the second century. The Diatessaron of Taitian (late second century) recognized our four gospels as authentic scripture. The early Christian writers of the second century and third century made their points by appealing the sacred writings of the apostles and other New Testament writers. The 10 volumes of the Ante-Nicean Fathers demonstrate this fact. The Alexandrian and Sinaiticus codices demonstrate that by the early fourth centuries the several books had been collected and were in use. Papyri fragments of scripture go back to the early second century. Prior to the fourth century Roman emperors confiscated and destroyed the sacred writings of the Christians. What do you suppose they destroyed?

* While the apostles were alive, the churches could appeal directly to them, even as the church in Antioch appealed to the apostles and elders in Jerusalem (Acts 15:2). They were empowered to lay their hands on select disciples and bestow upon them supernatural spiritual gifts (Acts 8:14-19). Among these gifts were "the word of wisdom, the word of knowledge, discerning of spirits" (I Cor. 12:7-10). This served as their source of divine knowledge and instruction until the sacred books were written and available. By the end of the first century the gifts were fading away since the churches now had in their possession "scripture inspired of God (which was) profitable for teaching, reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness: that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17).

* I remind you that it is not only Catholic lay persons who openly disagree with the official position of the church. Brave and daring clergy from around the world are occasionally heard openly contesting the official doctrine of their church.

Wishing you're a pleasant day, I am

Your friend, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S FOURTH LETTER

John: I am enjoying this friendly dialogue. I will try to respond to your comments and then present some more from the Catholic perspective.

First, it is nonsense to say that the RC church has two heads. I merely meant that the pope is the visible leader of the church. I live near a Church of Christ that also has a visible head: the pastor! So again, Jesus is the head of the Church, but He uses human instruments to guide (i.e., head) His flock. We say that the church is hierarchical, just as Christ commissioned the Apostles, who went out to the ends of the Earth commissioning others, and so on.

You say that Luke was not inspired to specifically mention infants in saying that whole households were baptized. Fair enough, but then how does that help either side in our debate? You interpret it to exclude infants, and I interpret it to include them. This passage is being interpreted by each of us, but in different ways! That's one of the problems with Sola Scriptura. And if infants cannot be baptized, then we must presume that no children can enter heaven (see John 3:5). The early Church leaders had no problem with infant baptism. Augustine clearly includes infants in his discussions of baptism

(**Letters of Augustine**, 98:2). I realize your denomination may not accept Augustine -- this certainly is not Scripture -- but I mention it to show the historical understanding of infant baptism.

I think it is a precarious position to say that the Bible is like a book of weights and measures, with no interpretation necessary. An example: you seem to take very literally the verse that no man should be called father (OK, spiritual father, not biological). Why then do Protestant churches selectively ignore the literal interpretation of chapter 6 of John's gospel? It seems pretty clear that Jesus is saying that "my flesh is real food; my blood is real drink" (verses 53-57). Any attempt to explain this in another manner would be an *interpretation*. OK, whose interpretation are we to believe? Catholics have maintained the same interpretation since the very early Church (for instance, the writings of Justin the Martyr and Ignatius of Antioch clearly portray Communion as the Body and Blood of Jesus). Admittedly, this is a difficult doctrine to understand, and even many of Our Lord's own followers could not accept it and walked away (John 6:66).

Sola Scriptura also is a "circular argument" because nowhere in the Bible does it say that "this book is to be your only authority." In fact, St. Paul says that we should heed the written word as well as the teachings passed on orally (2 Thess. 2:15).

You mention that the early church leaders did hold a position of authority until the books of the Bible were settled matter. I am somewhat familiar with the Muratorian Canon, and it is true that it delineated the accepted books. I did not mean to imply that everything was chaos, and then the Council of Nicea finally sorted it all out. There were generally accepted books (and a few that didn't make the final cut). But my point is this: The Bible was inspired by God and the books were assembled and ratified by the authority of the Apostles and their successors, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Apostles did not derive their authority from the Bible, but from Christ. You make it sound like the paradigm shifted once the books were in place.

If there is no human teaching authority, then how are we to respond to modern crises? The Bible does not speak explicitly about contraception, except perhaps Genesis 38:8-10. There, Onan "spills his seed upon the ground" and God strikes him down. If I am correct, many Protestants will say that Onan's sin was in disobeying God's instruction, but not specifically for spilling his seed. But the biblical penalty of this was not death, but public humiliation (Deut. 25:7-10).

You certainly know that all Christian communities viewed contraception as evil up until 1930. In that year, at the Lambeth Conference, the Church of England decided to allow birth control for married couples for important reasons. This of course has snowballed into today's sex-obsessed society. This is what happens when we separate the love-giving and life-giving aspects of human sexuality, much like a bulemic separates the enjoyment of food from the nutritional value of the food. The Bible might not speak of these things, which is where the teaching authority of the Church (which was simply the Catholic Church until the 1500s) comes in. The RC Church has consistently upheld the sanctity of life and sexuality for 2000 years. If your denomination teaches that contraception is acceptable, doesn't that mean that divine truth has done an about-face as of 1930?

Finally, it is true that there are "daring" clergy that speak out against some Catholic teachings. This has no bearing on whether the teachings are true! The Christian Church is a large family, and there have always been dissenters. I will gladly discuss with you what the RC church teaches officially, but I cannot always defend what various members say.

Sorry this is so long! But I again invite your comments...

Peace, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S FOURTH REPLY

Dear Friend John: It is a pleasure to exchange thoughts with you.

* Either your Roman Catholic church has one head or two heads. It cannot be both ways. It is one thing for God to use a human instrument in accomplishing his will. It is quite another to say that a man is the infallible head of the church who speaks for God. Any Christian man or woman can be an instrument of God, but only Jesus is head over all things to the church (Eph. 1:22).

* You say that you "can interpret it (household baptisms) to include them (babies). But you can only do so by unfounded assumption. I know that Lydia was baptized and that she was an adult. I know that Christ said baptize those who when taught the gospel, believe (Mark 16:15-16). I know that infants cannot receive instruction, cannot believe or make a choice to be baptized. To reach your conclusion you must go beyond what is written (I Cor. 4:6).

* Your assumption that if children cannot be baptized, then no children can enter heaven is faulty. It is based on the Augustinian error that babies are born sinners and therefore lost. Ezekiel, I value more than the illustrious Augustine. The prophet said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die; the son shall not bear the iniquity of the father..." (Ezek. 18:20). Sin is transgression of God's law (I John 3:4). It is knowing to do good and doing it not (Jas. 4:17). Sin is something a baby cannot do. Thus he has no personal guilt and does not need forgiveness. If it his misfortune to die, he is saved, because he has never sinned.

* The church fathers who had no problem with infant baptism were men who lived many years after the last apostle. They were not inspired by the Holy Spirit in their conclusions.

* The Bible is written to be understood. It provides us all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). The Bible contains several genre of literature: history, biography, epistles, drama, poetry and wisdom sayings. Its language contains a rich mixture of literal and figurative expressions. Each must be understood as the author intended. Just as I can read and understand a legal document or a letter from my daughter, I can read and understand the Bible.

* That many Protestants are confused in the understanding of God's Word, I do not dispute. One reason is the inclination to first decide what you believe and then read to Bible to try to find some word or line that agrees with your conclusion.

* Your citation of John 6:53-54 illustrates my previous point. "He that eateth my flesh and drinketh my blood..." Jesus himself explains his meaning in using this figurative expression as he continued his teaching. Consider vs. 63, "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing: the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and are life." Thus eating his flesh would profit nothing, it is his teaching that blesses us.

* That Justin Martyr or Ignatius of Antioch saw this as does your church only proves that two uninspired men agree with your view. I respect and honor the names of those early scholars, yet old error is still error.

* You say, "nowhere in the Bible does it say that 'this book is to be your only authority.'" Three times God straitly warns against adding to or taking away from his written word (Deut. 4:2; Prov. 30:6; Rev. 22:18-19). John warns against going beyond the doctrine or teaching of Christ (II John 9). On what basis would you object to the Book of Mormon being cited to prove a point?

* The traditions the Thessalonians were urge to hold (II Thess. 2:15), were those oral instructions of the inspired apostles and prophets which circulated among the churches. The letters of the inspired men were known and accepted as words from God. In II Thessalonians 3:6, Paul makes it crystal clear that the traditions were those they had received from the apostles.

* You correctly say, "The apostles did not derive their authority from the Bible, but from Christ," but draw the wrong conclusion from it. Jesus promised them, "when he the Spirit of truth is come, he shall guide you into all the truth...for

he shall take of mine, and shall declare it unto you" (John 16:13-15). They were to teach disciples to observe all things Christ had commanded (Matt. 28:20). What they spoke was God's Word as was what they wrote. The two did not conflict. Being long dead, we are left with only their written Word. That written word will make us "complete, furnished completely unto every good work" (II Tim. 3:16-17). When we read our New Testament we are receiving the instructions the Holy Spirit gave to the Apostles.

* It is true that the Bible does not mention many modern problems by name, but it does set forth divine principles by which the child of God can measure each new challenge and determine if it is good or bad (I Thess. 5:21-22).

* You state that "the Church (which was simply the Catholic Church until the 1500s)." Perhaps you have overlooked the Eastern Orthodox Church which existed as a separate body from 1054 A.D. In addition there were always small groups of separatists who did not recognize the See of Rome. These too "upheld the sanctity of life and sexuality."

So long for now. May God bless us as we stretch our minds around his Truth.

John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S FIFTH LETTER

Greetings again. I like your method of using a bullet or asterisk to address specific points, so I will try to do the same.

*I can understand your difficulty with the papacy in general, but when it comes to the "one vs. two heads," you are making a false dichotomy where one need not exist. Again, I pose my analogy with your own denomination: Doesn't your local church have a pastor? Isn't he the shepherd of that flock (i.e., the head)? Does he answer to a higher "head" or does each pastor teach whatever he wants? Thus, there needs to be a central head, but I never meant one that is equal to God. Please note the distinction.

In the Catholic Church, each pastor answers to a bishop, and the body of bishops, of which the pope is the head, constitute the teaching authority. This does not mean that we ignore the Bible -- *certainly the Scriptures are the basis for living a Christian life.* But you yourself stated that the Bible in its various genres "must be understood as the author intended." With all due respect, should I presume that YOU are the authority to help me in understanding various texts? Why not Pastor Bob from my nearby Baptist church? You see, Jesus left us with a *living* authority -- that has continued through two millennia -- who operates in conjunction with the Bible to help interpret various passages.

*I might also add that the Catholic Church does not have an "official teaching" on each and every Bible verse! The Church speaks up when there are major difficulties, such as the Arian heresy or Nestorianism, Donatism, etc. To answer an earlier question of yours, these disputes are why the Church has called together Councils over the centuries. Not to "make up" new doctrine, but to use the Bible and the consistent prior teachings to shed light on a new controversy. I fail to see where you can get a Bible verse that addressed in-vitro fertilization.

*Regarding infant baptism, I didn't realize that you don't believe in original sin. Read Romans 5:12 and 5:17. *Death came into the world to all via one man's sin. Of course babies have no personal sin, but they certainly have the effects of Adam's sin!* I might ask why have baptism at all then, if it does not transmit grace, but is only a symbol of a person's spoken belief in Jesus.

*As for John Chapter 6 and the teaching on the Eucharist, you correctly cite verse 63. But don't you see how that seems to contradict verse 53? Jesus is present in Communion, but not as a dead body -- that would be cannibalism. Rather, it is his risen, glorified body: living flesh! This is the only interpretation that would square the two verses.

*I did not mention the Orthodox Church when I spoke of consistent teaching through the years simply because there is very little doctrinal difference between that group and the Catholic Church. Their dispute was (and is) one of the

authority of Rome. This is why we call it a schism, rather than a full breach. The larger doctrinal issues came to the forefront 500 years later.

* Finally, I must again question your assertion that there are many Christian groups that uphold the sanctity of life and sexuality. Numerous Christian denominations accept abortion, which is nothing but infanticide. And as I mentioned before, all Christian denominations forbade contraception until 1930. Even if a church can make a case for allowing birth control nowadays, that would mean that this church was teaching error until 1930. I am interested in your comments regarding this.

While we seem to differ on many items, would you agree that most of the differences boil down to this: "Can we use the Bible alone or are there other forms of authority?" Is that a fair assessment?

Again I submit these comments in all charity and peace. May God's will be done on Earth as it is in heaven...

John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S FIFTH REPLY

Dear John B: Thanks for you most recent letter. I apologize for my delay in replying. My duties are sometimes overwhelming.

* It is true that in many Protestant churches the pastor is the defacto head of his congregation and most of them have national governing bodies that include a person or committee chosen for a term of office. Yet none of them claim to be the universal head of the church on earth. Churches of Christ are quite different in their polity. Looking to the New Testament we conclude that each church should select for itself a body of men to lead and direct their local affairs. These leaders are sometimes called elders (meaning older), bishops (meaning overseers), pastors (meaning shepherds). These three usages are seen in Paul's address to the elders of the church in Ephesus (Acts 20:17-31). These men, whose qualifications are set forth in I Tim. 3:1ff and Tit. 3:5-9, are the overseers of the congregation. They watch for the souls of their flock (Heb. 13:17). They select the man they deem best suited to be the preacher/teacher of their flock. He serves under their oversight as a member of their flock. We have no city, state, regional, national or international governing body. Each congregation is independent under Christ and is governed by his written Word.

* We do very well with this simple, biblical arrangement. While we have our disagreements, we have never come to blows, fought wars, or resorted to force to impose uniformity. Observation demonstrates that in your church, having a pope has not led to peaceful uniformity among your brethren. I recall the Great Schism (The Babylon Captivity) when two or was it three popes vied for control of the church. I read of the bishop in Africa who dabbles in juju and the Indian converts in the hinterlands of Mexico and other Hispanic nations who blend their native pagan practices with their Catholicism. In Europe and here in America some of the priests and scholars embrace skeptical views of the liberal theological higher critics.

* As to the question of in-vitro fertilization, three principles comes to mind. Human life alone is made in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). No one has the right to destroy innocent human life (Gen. 9:6). Whatsoever we do in word or in deed must be done in the name of the Lord (Col. 3:17). I think a distinction can be made in assisting a husband and wife to conceive a child of their own. For the last 50 years doctors have used a multitude of procedures to help accomplish conception. It is another question to buy and sell eggs and sperm, to create and then destroy unwanted embryos, etc. I think I earlier related to you that for many years I was the state president of the Tennessee Volunteers for Life and served on the board of directors of the National Right to Life Committee.

* Regarding original sin, neither of the passages you cite teach that Adam's guilt or a parent's guilt is passed to an new born child. Note that Paul says, "as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin; and so death passed unto all men ..." (Rom. 5:12). So also verse 17, "by the trespass of the one, death reigned through the one..."

When Adam sinned he opened as it were the bottle in which the deadly contagion called death was safely kept. Now every person born must die, not because of his sin or guilt, but because of the folly of Adam.

* Sin is transgression of God's law (I John 3:4). Sin is knowing to do good and doing it not (Jas. 4:7). All responsible souls who are old enough to make moral decisions have sinned and fall short of God's glory (Rom. 3:23). They need God's grace and forgiveness. He has ordained that grace will be extended when one believes and is baptized (Mark.16:16).

* John 6:63 explains what Jesus meant in vs. 53. "except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, ye have not life in yourselves." If you actually could transform the bread and wine into the literal flesh and blood of Jesus, it would profit you nothing. It is the spirit that giveth life; the words that Jesus spoke are spirit and are life. A simple laboratory analysis would demonstrate that before the priest blesses the host it is unleavened bread and the cup is wine. A similar test immediately after the blessing would reveal exactly the same chemical components. If you retrieved a wafer from the mouth of a communicant, it would be the same. We take the communion "in memory of" his body and blood shed for our sins and salvation (Matt. 26:26-29).

* It is true that the differences of the various Protestant churches and the Roman Church are more numerous than those of the Greek Orthodox faith, yet the latter church certainly does not feel itself "almost" identical with your church. It is true that the authority of Rome is a major impediment, but there are other doctrinal and practical differences such as marriage of the clergy.

* I offer no apology for Protestant churches that endorse abortion. But I can say that those who do so are the liberal churches whose faith in God, and the authority of his word has been severely weakened. They are driven by humanism, rather than by the teachings of Christ. Their endorsement is a shameful sinful blot on their record.

* You should not build your house on the matter of birth-control. Polls show that large numbers of American and European Catholics do practice artificial birth control. There is an unceasing clamor for the RC church to relent and change its position even as it has on other matters in the past. When people become educated they are not as willing to allow an unmarried clergy to tell them how to manage the most intimate aspect of their marriage relationship. Too many children means poverty for those whose ability to earn is limited. That will motivate the thinking person to limit the number of his offspring.

* I would restate your final question, "Is the Bible alone an adequate source of spiritual information and standard for man's salvation, his worship and service to God?" To this I would without hesitation say Yes.

You probably know that I am a minister of the Church of Christ in Surprise, AZ. Perhaps you can tell me something about yourself.

May God grant you a happy and prosperous day. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S SIXTH LETTER

Greetings again: I'm glad you reminded me to share a little about myself. (I think I knew from the newsletter that you were from Arizona, but I didn't know you were a pastor.) I live in Rochester Hills, Michigan, and I am an engineer working in the automotive industry. I've been Catholic all my life. I admit I didn't always understand the teachings and the reasons behind the doctrines, so my own prayer and research has shed light onto the consistency of the Catholic Church. (Consistency in faith and morals, recall, because some *practices* are certainly changeable, such as married clergy or Latin vs. English.) Also, I have a wonderful family in my wife and two small boys.

* Thanks for the info on your denomination's structure. I still wonder what happens if one pastor (or bishop, or group of elders, etc.) reads a different meaning into a Bible verse. I'm sure that must happen, but it sounds like it's not a major difficulty (I'm glad it hasn't come to blows! In earlier times this indeed has happened -- especially in the Middle Ages.) One question, just for my own curiosity: Is the Church of Christ considered an Evangelical or Fundamentalist group, or is it more of a mainline Protestant denomination?

* I would agree that your amended question summarizes our differences: "Is the Bible alone an adequate source of spiritual information and standard for man's salvation, his worship and service to God?" While you might simply say "yes," I would answer "Yes, but..." because we both agreed that the books of the Bible must be interpreted correctly based on the genre, context, etc. Remember, Jesus established the Church, guided by the Holy Spirit, to promulgate the Good News. Now, throughout our discussion, I fear that I may have made you think that I (well, the RC Church) dislike or down-play the Bible. Not at all -- we consider the Bible the Word of God, written by inspired human hands. But the Holy Spirit guides the Church throughout the centuries in protecting the faith.

* You have again brought up the fact that many priests have very liberal views or have committed crimes. They are wrong, but so what? I can defend what the RC Church teaches, not its human members. Remember, Jesus promised the Holy Spirit to guide the Church, not each member. Are you claiming that no pastors in your denomination have fallen in theology or moral living?

* Regarding the life issues, I am glad to hear that you were (and perhaps still are) so active in the pro-life cause. Perhaps you made some friends who are Catholic while working with the National RTL (Right to Life). While I know you do not agree with all the theology of Catholics, surely you have seen evidence of the Catholic Church's stance against abortion. I know of no other religious group that is so unwavering in its teaching on that issue.

And while many people say that birth control and in-vitro fertilization are totally unrelated to abortion, I would say that they are all part of a disrespect for God's creative power, although abortion is obviously the gravest form of disrespect for creation. I'd like to briefly outline the Catholic view of sex so that you may see the reasons behind such prohibitions. Sex has two aspects: love-giving and life-giving (or "unitive" and "procreative"). God designed these into one act, and to eliminate either one is a serious sin. Some have hyped one aspect over another (such as Augustine, who disliked the "eros" aspect, and placed too much emphasis on procreation). But the Christian church always held the two aspects together, until 1930 as I mentioned before. Now, contraception cuts off the life-giving aspect, so as to only enjoy the love-giving. (Think of a bulimic who enjoys food but throws it up -- is that really what God gave us food for?) As you said, the "thinking couple" should certainly discuss and plan the desired number of children, based on finances, health, etc. But a basic tenet of Catholic theology is that we can never directly do evil in order to bring about a good result. The solution would be natural family planning, which is 96 percent effective and does not separate the two aspects.

The opposite sin is what we call in-vitro fertilization: the love-giving aspect is circumvented so as to only get the life-giving aspect. While I sympathize with childless couples, remember that one can never directly do evil in order to bring about a good result.

* Finally, you are right that a majority of Catholics in America and Europe practice birth control, but since when is Christianity a democracy? You may recall that in the early Church, Athanasius was exiled by his fellow bishops for denouncing Arianism, which was creeping into some clerics' teachings. In fact, there was a time when only he and the pope rejected Arianism. (Later, it was finally settled, and he was vindicated.) So I look to what the truth is, not what my

fellow parishioners are doing.

My hope is that in sharing some of the reasoning and history of Catholic beliefs, non-Catholics will not be so quick to dismiss these things as superstitions fabricated by Rome. Rather, they are Christian teachings handed down through the ages -- sometimes with clarification, but never contradiction. I think many Protestant churches are re-hashing some of the debates that the early Christians settled long ago (even Arianism is back in vogue with some groups today!).

Until our next visit, may all peace and good wishes be yours... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S SIXTH REPLY

Dear John B: I enjoyed reading your response to my recent letter. Your knowledge and understanding of your faith leads me to wonder if perhaps at one point you might have studied for the priesthood? Few layman would be able to present their case as well as you do.

* You ask what happens if one minister or one church of Christ arrives at a different understanding of God's Word? Such does happen, as is bound to, when Christians are free to use their minds to think and reason upon God's teaching. When the matter is of little consequence, such as how to implement a divine command, or involves some speculative point which has no bearing on man's salvation, we encourage tolerance and forbearance with one another. We see Romans 14 & 15 as furnishing a plan for dealing with such inconsequential matters. If it is a more serious matter we discuss it through articles published in journals and books read by our people, in seminars, forums and polemical discussions. Our method is to search the Scriptures to find what God's Word says on the subject. Our goal is to arrive at a common understanding of that Word. In all cases all consider the Bible to be the final, complete and absolute authority. Each person is free to present his best case. Men who are respected for their extensive knowledge and their faithfulness to the Cause of Christ are listened to and generally a consensus is attained. If the issue is not critical to salvation and the welfare of the church and if the person or persons with the minority view are not aggressive in promoting it, we generally are able to "live and let live." If however the person or group is determined to push their idea to the point of causing division in our ranks we encourage our brethren to reject them as factious men (Tit. 3:9-10). In no case do we employ coercion to force conformity. Each congregation is autonomous (self-governing) which allows each congregation the liberty to decide where it will stand on the matter. While we have had our unresolvable issues, over all we have been able to maintain a reasonable level of unity in our ranks.

* The Church of Christ, being conservative in theology and practice would fall into the same general category as the Evangelical bodies. While there are basic fundamentals of the faith that we view as non-negotiable, what is commonly understood by "Fundamentalist" we would consider "ultra conservative." I think it fair to say we put more emphasis on education and scholarship than the typical Fundamentalist. In actuality, our stance differs from both these groups. Like you, we hold that Christ established only one church (Eph. 4:4; 1:22). Denominationalism we hold to be contrary to the expressed will of God (I Cor. 1: 10-13). We not only speak of the Bible as the authority for all things religious, we teach our people they must obey its message as well. We believe that faith must be coupled with obedience to Christ to be effective in saving us (Gal. 5:6; Jas. 2:20-26). We understand the Bible to teach that baptism is essential to man's salvation (Acts 2:38; 22:16). We bear little resemblance to the typical mainline Protestant denomination.

* You agree the Bible is the divine standard for God's people, yet you qualify it with "But" we need someone to tell us what it means, i.e., a pope. We hold the Bible to be adequate for all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). It will make us complete, furnished completely unto every good work (II Tim. 3:16-17). If by chance a person in some remote place should find a copy of the Bible which he was able to read, we believe he could understand it sufficiently to come to faith in Christ and a realization of what God wants him to do to be saved. We believe he could worship God acceptably with such knowledge as he gained from his study. He could share his faith with his neighbors and hopefully lead some of them to salvation. Together they would constitute a church. Following the instructions found in their Bible they could worship in a way acceptable to God. All of this could be done with only a Bible in hand. Would you concede this is possible? Would that person's salvation, his worship or the church they constituted bear any resemblance to that

taught and practiced by your church?

* As to the Roman Catholic Church's attitude toward the Bible, history reveals a sad and shameful record. Remember, it was only since the reforms of John XXIII that Catholic laymen have been encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. The record of Catholic clerics burning Bibles and those who dared to translate the Bible into the common vernacular...and those who sought to distribute the Bible is a dark blot on your history. We can all be grateful that a better day has dawned in this regard.

* While your church's stand against abortion is certainly commendable, its view on family planning has been oppressive to the poor who felt spiritually obligated to reject birth control. The prosperous family with a \$100,000 per year income can afford the traditional Catholic view point. If they have eight children, they still have \$10,000 to meet the needs of each member. The poor, third world family with eight little ones, whose total income is \$1,000 per year has to manage on \$100 per person each year. Each child born forces them deeper into poverty. While your church's prohibition does bring huge numbers into the Catholic fold each year, it imposes great hardships on many faithful adherents.

* Your analysis of the purposes of sex in marriage is true and commendable. The concept of love-giving and life-giving is lovely. Your church agrees that a family can limit their number of children. It errs by saying it can only be done by what they call the "Natural Family Planning" method. Conception is avoided by the calendar and thermometer or by a manufactured method. In either case the deed is done. The difference in how it is done is of no consequence. This in no way gives acceptance or approval of abortion as a means to destroy an unwanted pregnancy.

* It is true the heresies of the past continue to resurface in our modern world. Satan never accepts defeat, he never rests. He can always find someone who is willing to believe his lie and attempt to teach it to others. It is the task of Christians to "preach the word in season or out of season" (II Tim. 4:2); to contend earnestly for the faith once delivered to the saints (Jude 3); to be set for the defense of the gospel (Phil. 1:16).

Again I am enjoying our correspondence. I commend you for your good and pleasant spirit. May it ever be our commitment to follow Christ (Matt. 16:24) and to search the scriptures daily to see if things be true or false (Acts 17:11).

I am your friend in hope of heaven, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S SEVENTH LETTER

Thank you for your last email. I have never studied for the priesthood, but I'll take it as a compliment.

* It is definitely true that most of my fellow Catholics are very weak in their knowledge of the faith. Much of this is simply because many Catholics are "cultural Catholics" that get married at church, have the baby baptized, and perhaps attend on Christmas and Easter! I am glad they do -- we are a welcoming Church -- but they are not on fire for Jesus. (Yes, Catholics can and should proclaim Jesus as their Lord and Savior!) And they do a disservice to the Protestant world by giving the Catholic Church a bad name; they do things out of superstition or they think that simply doing a few charitable works will get them into heaven.

* So I hope I have softened your attitude somewhat by clarifying what we really believe. I propose that we have more in common than is often thought.

* Most of my knowledge is not from religion classes, but from my own study and search for answers to my own questions. I mentioned that I am an engineer, so I like logical explanations. I have found Catholic teaching to be most logical. Of course, I have to add that throughout history, the members and leaders of the Church have not always been logical -- some were downright stupid and of course sinful. But notice how I keep making a distinction between Church teachings and the people that make up the Church!

* Now, just to touch on a few more of the issues... Thank you for explaining how your denomination handles religious and moral issues. I would agree with that methodology. In fact, it sounds just like our Church Councils, where bishops from all over the world gather to pray and discuss issues. If they choose, they can then issue formal proclamations.

* I have no qualms about inserting the "but..." clause when discussing the authority of the Bible. In fact, I find it ironic that other denominations accept the Catholic Church's authority in establishing the formal canon of scripture (4th century), but then ignore that same authority on other issues. In a sense, each person then becomes his own authority! I know we discussed this before; you mentioned that the New Testament books were generally agreed upon, but that's not the same as a formal canon. Remember, nowhere in the Bible does it say that "these books are to be your sole authority." You offered II John 9, but that doesn't seem to list the books of the New Testament. And the quote from Revelation 22 simply holds up that one book as inspired. So somewhere down the line, Church leaders had to formally proclaim the canon. (At that same Council, the Christian leaders reaffirmed the belief of Jesus being bodily present in the Eucharist. So again, Protestants seem to pick and choose which of these early proclamations they wish to adhere to.)

* You say that "history reveals a sad and shameful record" regarding the RC and the Bible. Perhaps that would be history according to Chick Publications, (Anti-Catholic tracts) but not unbiased history. In addition to the Church's role in establishing the Bible, Catholics maintained these sacred writings through the centuries. Realize that most people couldn't even read! Now, it is true that in some churches the Bible was chained. But let's be reasonable; it's not because they feared that people would read the book -- it's because those books were rare and needed to be accessible! (Doesn't your library have an electronic "chain" on its books?) I would point out that Martin Luther chose to drop books from the Bible because they did not suit his beliefs. (Yes, these deuterocanonical books were accepted by all Christians until he resurrected that debate in the 1500s. But we can save that discussion for another email.)

* And regarding birth control, I too find the Catholic teaching about love and life to be beautiful. In today's society, it certainly can be taxing on families that have many children. But are we to then say "Well, I guess we can bend the moral law now"? No! Being a Christian has always been difficult in this world. And with today's affluent lifestyle blended with our burdensome tax and welfare structure, it can indeed be burdensome on poor families. Let's look at our priorities, though. If we want to live by the Bible, examine Genesis 1:28 and Psalm 127:3-5. We should not cut off God's creative power by contracepting; rather, we should lobby our government to allow school vouchers, eliminate funding of Planned Parenthood (a pro-abortion organization), and restructure the tax system.

* You say that our Church errs; you say that there is no difference between Natural Family Planning and other methods of avoiding pregnancy. There certainly is: Artificial contraception directly shuts God out from the relationship. The spouses say to each other, "I give you all of myself, except this..." It's no surprise that acceptance of this sin in earlier decades has now led to today's problems with abortion and homosexual "marriage". If you say we can have love-giving divorced from life-giving, then how can you dispute homosexuality? Polygamy? Bestiality? The option of Natural Family Planning does not shut God out. It uses the God-given cycle of a woman to observe certain times of abstinence. God is still a part of the marriage and the spouses choose when to give their bodies -- complete and unmutated -- to each other. A growing number of Protestants are coming to accept this notion. It doesn't mean they are capitulating to "Papist" teaching, but it's very much in tune with all of Christianity.

Wishing you all blessings... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S SEVENTH REPLY

Dear Friend John B.: Thank you for sharing your thoughts and convictions about the faith and practice of your Roman Catholic Church. Our exchanges have been both enlightening and refreshing. I look forward to receiving them.

* Your concession indicate that you are a man with an open, honest mind. For that I commend you.

* Our method for determining the truth of a question is far different from your bishop's councils. We do not elect or appoint delegates to represent our churches in such situations. We have no formal meetings of church leaders to resolve such matters by a majority vote. We issue no proclamations. Rather by searching the Scriptures we seek to determine the will of Christ in the matter (Acts 17:11). Over a period of time, those whose presentation (arguments) are reasonable, logical and above all Scriptural, prevail in the open hearts of honest men. We have no hierarchy to impose an answer on our preachers and churches. We look to and answer only to the New Testament of Christ.

* As to the New Testament canon, I remind you that all the books of our New Testament, including your Catholic edition, were written and in general circulation long before the church in Rome began to assert herself and claim to be the chief see of the church. By the opening of the second century these 27 books were known recognized and accepted as Scripture by the majority of all Christians, without any advice or approval from the church in Rome.

* The event to which you refer, where a formal statement of the accepted New Testament books was issued in Rome in 389, was an attempt to block those false teachers who attached the names of various apostles and church leaders of the apostolic age to their worthless documents. It distinguished between those books acknowledged from the beginning to be true scripture from the uninspired productions of heretics. Athanasius in his Easter Letter (A. D. 367) mentioned all the 27 books of the New Testament to the exclusion of others.

* As to the validity and authority of the New Testament of Christ, if the church in Rome had been crushed and destroyed by the pagan Emperors, the church would still have had her 27 books from the apostles and prophets of Christ. Had there never been a conclave a Rome to discuss the canon, the church would have continued to worship and follow the Savior as their scripture taught.

* We approach the question of the church from two different perspectives. We both agree that Christ established his church in Jerusalem in the year of his death and resurrection. We agree that the church in the first century was spread throughout the Roman Empire. Christianity was taken to Rome and churches were planted there. (If you compare them closely, the church of the New Testament bears little resemblance to the present day Church of Rome.) The church continued to expand in the face of opposition and persecution from both Jews and pagans and by the government of Rome and her petty provincial rulers. We agree that a major shift occurred with the triumph of General Constantine over General Maxentius in 312 at the Battle of Milvian Bridge. With Constantine's ascension to power, the persecution came to an end, Christianity was legalized and for the first time the churches had a friend and sympathizer in the highest seat of power. Here our understanding likely diverges. We concluded that Constantine's policies and largesse to the churches and her leaders corrupted the church. From being persecuted, she became a persecutor. From being a servant to humanity, she began to aspire for the position of political mistress. Rather than be content with being the simple family of Christ, the church of those who served Christ, she aspired for political power, greatness and grandeur...like the rulers of the empire enjoyed. Rather than be subject to the law of Christ, her leaders began to decide for themselves what would be the faith and standards of the church.

To use a modern illustration. The great universities such as Harvard, Yale and Princeton began as Christian schools with the primary purpose to train young men to be servants (ministers) of the churches. Over time, as the schools grew in size, wealth, influence and power, they completely abandoned their spiritual roots and became secular. Eventually they became throughly anti-Christian.

As the mainstream of the church gradually absorbed the spirit of the world and drifted away from her original faith and practice, those whose faith would not allow them to be part of that corrupted system withdrew and continued to worship and serve God as the Lord and his apostles had ordained. Sadly they endured persecution from the larger body of the

church which had by then become political and unwilling to allow dissent. Forced by persecution to go underground, these godly souls maintained their faith and shared it with others. Christ says the seed of his kingdom is the word of God (Luke 8:11). So long as humanity has access to the Scripture the church can spring up like seed planted in new ground. This has indeed happened around the world as people learned about Christ and his gospel and gave their lives to him. We view the Catholic Church in the same way, the early supporters of Yale, Harvard, etc. likely viewed the schools they believed in and supported. (I say not these things with malice, but only to help you understand how we view these things...our presuppositions). While the various Councils and their pronouncements are of historical interest, we put no stock in their pronouncements. We go beyond them, back to the Bible for our answers.

* You describe artificial birth control as "cutting off God's creative power." But couples using your Natural Family Planning method are seeking to circumvent and avoid God's creative power. They do not wish to have an unlimited number of children they cannot afford to raise. The difference is one of words, not substance. This prompts me to ask, is not the rigid rule of celibacy, which your church enforces on both men and women who officially serve the church, interfere with God's plan. For example God says "Let marriage be had in honor among all and the bed undefiled" (Heb. 13:4). He said to the human race (Adam and Eve) be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth (Gen. 1:28). Paul wrote the Corinthians, "Let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Cor. 7:2). To Timothy he wrote, "The Spirit said expressly, that in later times some shall fall away from the faith...forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats..." (I Tim. 4:1-2). Over the long years of her ascendancy, the Roman Church has forbidden likely a million or more of her male and female servants from enjoying the privilege of marriage and the possibility of producing children made in the image of God. Has not this cut them off from God's creative power?

* We reject and condemn homosexuality, bestiality and polygamy because God's word speaks clearly to these matters. "Thou shalt not lie with mankind, as with womankind: it is abomination. And thou shalt not lie with any beast to defile thyself there with...it is confusion" (Lev. 18:22-23). As to polygamy, Jesus cited the way God created the first of our race as the divine pattern for marriage. God made them male and female and said, For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother and shall cleave to his wife and they two shall become one flesh" (Matt. 19:4-6). Two, not three or more, settles it for us. That your Natural Family Planning method may have some health benefits over artificial methods I concede, but it is not a law ordained by God.

I apologize for taking so much space to answer your points. I will try to be more concise in future exchanges.

May you and yours enjoy a wonderful day, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S EIGHTH LETTER

I enjoy reading your emails, too. If we both take the time to read and understand each point of view, I trust that the Holy Spirit will guide our endeavors.

* We seem to be at a standstill as to when the Bible (NT) came into being. You claim it as your sole authority, but offer a nebulous idea that it was always understood as such. You also claim that the books "were written and in general circulation long before the church in Rome began to assert herself and claim to be the chief see of the church." This is wrong: the chief see of the church has always been in the Apostles (chief among them Peter), some of whom wrote those books. This authority was handed down to their successors ("ordination"), who since the time of Peter have been stationed in Rome (notwithstanding Avignon and other flights for safety).

* You trace the political history of the early Church, and yes, I have no disagreements with that. But from the tone, you seem to have difficulty with the grandeur (materialism?) displayed in Catholic churches. Yes, there are jeweled chalices and golden statues, but these are not for the personal glorification of the priests or bishops, but rather for the glory of God. Recall that Jesus did not shun the woman who wanted to wash his feet with expensive perfume. And yes, the Vatican has great art treasures, but these are first of all for God's glory, and secondly, they actually belong to all the people, not the Pope.

* Also, in your recounting of history you say that the Church lost its mission and fell by the wayside in favor of materialism and power, only to be rediscovered by the Reformers. This of course is in direct conflict with Scripture, where Jesus promised to be with his Church until the end of time. And He has done so, protecting the faith from error. Your denomination, and all others, can only be traced back a century or two (or five, for some). The Church founded by Jesus continues today only in the Catholic Church. The analogy of Harvard and Princeton is an interesting one, but alas, they were not given a guarantee by Christ Himself.

* I do not mean any unfriendliness by these comments. I think the bulk of the blame for the disunity caused by the Reformation lies with the Catholic bishops, who did not adequately rebuke priests who were teaching heresy. (Catholicism never allowed the selling of indulgences! That was a local practice by a few clerics that was indeed wrong, but starting a new splinter church was not the answer, either.)

* As for birth control, I suggest you re-read my explanation. You seem to think that both NFP (Natural Family Planning) and artificial contraception cut off God's creative power. No -- NFP says "We choose not to engage in an act that by design allows for God's creative power." Don't you agree that it is different from saying "We will engage in this act, BUT we must avoid this aspect of the marital act." So the difference is one of substance and actions, not just words.

* The idea of priestly celibacy has nothing whatsoever to do with contraception! Married people promise to give each other their bodies; a priest gives himself to the Church, which is his family. This doesn't violate any law from above. You cannot take Bible quotes to suit your own biases (you gave I Cor. 7:2 -- the full context of that verse says that such should be the case only if immorality would be otherwise). Plus, read further in that same chapter: Paul encourages the unmarried to remain that way (verse 8) and he wishes that everyone were as he is (verse 7). Would you say that Paul is violating the command to be fruitful and multiply?

* Finally, I did not get a chance to reply to an earlier discussion about Catholics believing that Jesus is present, body and blood, in Communion. You stated correctly that a simple laboratory analysis shows that the physical elements remain as bread and wine. We know that, but herein lies a great mystery. And mystery is something that a Christian need not shy away from. Faith tells me that it is the body and blood of Our Lord, even though it doesn't look like it. Most people are conscious of only two "planes" of reality: the physical and the symbolic. But Christianity has historically recognized a third plane: the sacramental. We say baptism is being "born again" -- not physically, as Nicodemus thought, but not symbolically, either. Instead, baptism is a sacramental rebirth. Similarly, Jesus is not physically present in the Eucharist with bones and skin; His body has ascended into heaven. But He is present *sacramentally*. The theological term for the bread and wine is that they are merely the "accidents". But the "substance" itself has been changed. This gets into a whole other science called ontology.

I hope all is well in Arizona. We got a taste of your weather with 90 and 100 degrees this past week!

Bye for now...John B.

JOHN WADDEY'S EIGHTH REPLY

Dear John B: Good to hear from you again and to exchange ideas and information about the most important issue of life.

* You insist that the church in Rome was always the chief seat of authority in the Christ. Now we know the church began in Jerusalem in ca 33 A. D. The origin of the church in Rome is unknown, but when Paul wrote his epistle to them in 55 or 56 A.D. he explained to that he wanted to come that he might impart to them some spiritual gift (Rom. 1:11). If Peter were already there, he could have done that. (Spiritual gifts were imparted by the laying on an apostle's hands Acts 8:14-19). The fact that they needed such indicates that Paul would be the first apostle in their midst.

* You cannot read in the New Testament (1). That there was to be an earthly head of the church, (2). That Peter was the first earthly head, (3). That any divine arrangement for succession was ordained, (4) That Rome was to be the

headquarters of the universal church, (5). That the church in Rome was to have preeminence over the rest. All of these claims are made by your church, but they do so without biblical authority.

* Perhaps you could elaborate and explain how gorgeous robes, gold and bejeweled objects used in worship could glorify God rather than the men who wear and use them? Peter told the man at the beautiful gate of the temple, "Silver and gold have we none" (Acts 3:6). Our precious Lord Jesus had no earthly wealth. He had no place to lay his head (Lk. 9:58). It seems most unlike Christ to see a church with a vast treasure house of wealth asking poor members, barely clinging to the threads of life for, for contributions to its coffers.

* It is quite true that Jesus promised that he would be with his disciples always, even to the ends of the earth (Matt. 28:20). Your mistake is in thinking the word "church" refers to the religious institution known as the Roman Catholic Church. The word translated church means, "a called out people." It never refers to sacred buildings where the church might meet for worship. Neither does it describe religious institutions that men might create. Christ was with his saved people...i.e., his church, even if they were a persecuted minority meeting in hiding. The Holy Spirit dwells in the heart of saved people, not in temples made with human hands (I Cor. 6:19). The passage most relied upon by the leaders of your church is Matt. 16:18 where the Master said, "Upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it." The meaning is clear in the definition of Hades, "the place of the dead." He promised he was going to build his church. He then told them he must go unto Jerusalem and be killed (16:21). They would surely wonder, how then can you build your church if they are going to kill you? He explained how it was that the gates of the Hadean realm would not be able to contain him. "On the third day he would be raised up" (16:21b). Rather than teaching that his church could never apostatize, he was teaching that death would not keep him from founding it.

* You say the bishops of your church did not adequately rebuke the reformers of the 14th, 15th and 16th century. Some they burned at the stake, others they tortured. They excommunicated them. They made war on the reforming churches. What other measures would you advocate for them to have used? Would you propose similar measures for today in an unchanging church?

* Christ's church is propagated by the teaching of the divine gospel. Christ uses the analogy of good seed planted in the ground (Matt. 13:18-23). The seed he says is the word of God (Luke 8:11). In every generation since her beginning, wherever the gospel in its purity was preached and honest men embraced it, the church of Christ was planted. There were true, Bible-believing Christians meeting independently of the Catholic Church all during her years of dominion, even as there are today.

* Your response to my use of I Cor. 7:2, "the full context of that verse says that such should be the case only if immorality would be otherwise." If I may say so in a tactful and diplomatic way, the scandals of the priests exposed in the last few years demonstrates my point and agrees with your reading of the verse.

* It was Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit who wrote, "The Spirit saith expressly that in later times some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons...forbidding to marry...." (I Tim. 4:1-3). This statement is forceful and clear. It needs no special interpretation, just believing. It is one thing for a person to choose not to marry, to never to find the right mate or to have some physical impediment that would keep them single, but to impose a law of celibacy on servants of the church in the face of Paul's warning is quite another.

* As to your explanation of the "real presence" in communion. Communicants like you who are well educated can rationalize a "sacramental" presence. But for the bulk of the worshipers across the ages and in the third world today, they believe the words they hear to mean that somehow the priest's blessing of the host works a miracle and makes it the body and blood of the Savior. Interesting, **Webster's Collegiate Dictionary** defines Sacramentarian as "one who interprets sacraments as merely visible symbols. The is very similar to our understanding of the teaching of Christ that the bread and wine are memorials or reminders of his suffering on Calvary (I Cor. 11:24-25).

Again may I say that I am enjoying our cordial correspondence. You do a very good job presenting the case for Catholicism. I pray that our studies will be mutually beneficial. Feel free to ask any additional questions you may have regarding the Church of Christ or our understanding of God's Word.

Have a good week end. The Lord be with you. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S NINTH LETTER

Hello again! All peace and good cheer from the Motor City. I too am learning much and I think I'll save all these emails over to my hard drive (since you also use AOL, you know that even saved emails drop off the system after a month or so!).

* As to your first point on the last letter, I must revise what I wrote. Yes, the Church was not always seated at Rome, because it was certainly started in Jerusalem. Then the Apostles were sent out to the ends of the earth. Peter of course went to Rome, and was martyred there (see I Peter 5:13 -- keep in mind that Babylon was code for Rome; Nebuchadnezzar's Babylon was in ruins). Other early writers such as Tertullian and Eusebius also allude to Peter at Rome. The fact that Paul did not mention it means that they were not there at the same time.

* You claim that we cannot determine that Peter was the first leader of the Church. But notice that Peter is always listed first in any Biblical listing of the Apostles. And it is Peter who is considered as the final authority at the meeting of the disciples in Jerusalem. And of course I have cited Matthew 16:18. But I don't quite follow your interpretation of that verse. Yes, the gates of hell (Hades) will not prevail against the Church, but you make a leap to assume that Jesus means the church is his own physical body? That doesn't seem to square with the context. Verse 21 is not an integral part of the discourse about his Church in verses 15-20.

* Also, in response to your questions, the Catholic Church never claimed that Rome was to be divinely mandated as the headquarters. But does that mean it cannot be? Not that it matters; I wouldn't care if the Pope moved to Brazil -- he would still be the successor ("He who hears you, hears me" Luke 10:16).

* As for the robes, chalices, etc., you are correct that Jesus had no material wealth. But you overlooked my mention of the woman with the alabaster jar -- he did not shun her use of quality materials. And God also commanded that the Ark be adorned with pure gold (Exodus 25:23-29). Would He command this if it violated His own Ten Commandments? As Christians, we cannot be minimalists. God deserves our very best. Of course, He has no need for gold, incense, robes, etc., but it is our meager human attempt to honor and adore our Lord. What He desires most is our hearts, but that does not mean that our mode of worship must be watered down. The book of Revelation is paralleled by the Catholic Mass, and is a window into the angels praising and worshipping God forever!

* I understand your skittishness about the Church as an institution, particularly given some of the misdeeds committed by popes and bishops over the centuries. But does that strip them of their teaching authority? No pope has ever promulgated a teaching on faith or morals that is contradictory to the Bible. That's a big claim, but I will defend it if needed! Some popes have acted quite contrary to the Bible, of course, but their teaching office is directly descended from Peter.

* You claim that Jesus did not intend to start an institutional religion? He was a Jew, so it's unlikely that He disliked organized religion. (Catholics realize that "church" does not mean a building.) Read Matthew 18:17: "If he (a brother) refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church." It doesn't sound to me like the church is a building *or* a person. Also remember the teaching that we are the body of Christ, and a body has structure to it. Finally, an institution ensures unity. Where Protestants have split from that institution, disunity has followed (there are now many thousands of Protestant churches, each claiming to teach the truth!).

* I claimed that the RC leaders did not adequately rebuke clerics who had been selling indulgences in Germany. You seem to think that those were the people that were burned at the stake, and ask what more could have been done. But those were quite different scenarios. Bishops have authority (and a duty) to correct and even withdraw clergy that teach heresy. This is what I was referring to; I did not imply that they should have been killed.

* Back to celibacy and I Cor. 7:2. Indeed, it says that in cases of immorality, one should get married. But you are reading into this that all men should be married! Notice the condition of immorality being the qualifier. So there is no divine mandate that all men should be married.

* Or perhaps you are implying that all priests are prone to immorality since they are celibate, and so they automatically fall under this prerequisite condition mandating marriage. But I remind you that scandal is not a monopoly of Catholics. The priest scandal was quite overdone by the media; simple research will reveal an equal number of Protestant clergy that were guilty of such crimes. It saddened me to read about a Church of Christ pastor in nearby Ohio that was arrested last week on child porn charges (he was married). So it's best not to build a scriptural interpretation around current events.

* You claim that I can "rationalize" a sacramental presence for Communion, but that less-educated Catholics really believe that it's the body and blood. You have missed the point -- I do believe it is the body and blood. And even the poorest, least-educated Catholic knows that it is not physical blood (they do have taste buds!). So it is a miraculous change *in substance* that takes place, but one that is not detectable by our senses. (We walk by faith, not by sight...)

* I now understand that your denomination only believes and practices what is given in Scripture, and then only when interpreted correctly. But please study what the early Christians did in the first century, and the second century, and the third.... etc. We have early writings of these Christians -- they are not inspired, but they can serve as reliable descriptions of how they worshiped and what they taught. The Catholic Mass is almost the exact service described by Justin Martyr: After gathering for prayer, the Word is proclaimed, followed by comments (sermon) and then the needs of the community are offered (prayers of petition). This is followed by the offering of bread and wine, and the blessing, after which all partake of the "body and blood" of Christ. It is then documented that the Eucharist was taken to those that are sick, and stored appropriately (today we store Communion for the sick in tabernacles). This is all around AD 150! Would you claim that the Church service described had already been perverted by Roman or other pagan influences? So there's no need to ignore what Christians believed and practiced for centuries and then try to re-create a church. Let's listen to our forebears who were much closer to the time of the Apostles.

Sorry it's so long! Maybe we can "table" some of the items, but I do always enjoy hearing your take on things.

Peace, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S NINTH REPLY

Dear Pen-pal John: Good to hear from you again. I trust you are well and happy and enjoying the life God has given us.

* We do not dispute that Peter went to Rome. However the fact that he went to Rome in no way proves he was the first pope of the church. Paul went to Rome. But he was not the pope. Even I went to Rome. All this proves is that Peter went to Rome as part of his evangelistic work. The rest is assumption based on tradition.

* It is true that Peter was a leader among the apostles. It is not shown in the New Testament that he was given primacy over the others. Remember that Paul rebuked Peter to his face while in Antioch (Gal. 2:11). If you will reread the gathering of the apostles and elders in Jerusalem it was James the brother of the Lord who summed up the situation and gave the final exhortation and recommendation (Acts 15:31-21). Peter's work is featured in Acts 1-12. Chapters 12-28 focus on the missionary outreach of Paul. Paul gave us 13 letters, while Peter provided 2. The point of all of this is that no one of the apostles was decreed to be head of the church. That place was Christ's alone (Eph. 1:22).

* Regarding Matt. 16:16-20, I did not say or imply that the church is the physical body of Christ. It is depicted in many places as the spiritual body of Christ. What is not found in Scripture is an organization such as your Roman Catholic church with an earthly headquarters, a claim to statehood, a human head, a heirarchy of men who govern the whole universal church, a claim to be a political kingdom with ambassadors, legates, etc. Such things are borrowed either from

the political kingdom of Israel or from the political kingdom of Rome which the church replaced at her collapse in 476 A.D.

* That Jesus allowed the woman to anoint his feet with the precious ointment says nothing at all about a display of magnificence and wealth, pomp and ceremony such as your church has. The woman was not the church. Her story is a lesson demonstrating the generosity of love. A similar point could have been made about the precious ointments used to dress the dead body of the Lord (John 19:39). While these teach us the need to show our gratitude to those who have blessed us, they say nothing about the church adorning herself in splendor and wealth. That under the Mosaic system God ordered the temple furniture to be overlaid with gold and the mercy seat to be of beaten gold does not authorize the church to have gold covered furniture. We are under the headship of Jesus (Matt. 28:18). His words (not Moses') will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). Under that old system baby boys were circumcised as a part of their religion. Animals were sacrificed. Paul shows us that Christ took the Mosaic code out of the way, nailing it to his cross (Col. 2:14-16).

* It is true that owe God our very best, but that does not mean that church leaders have to have Mercedes cars or that our buildings have to be elaborate, bejeweled cathedrals. Every Christian is a holy priest who offers up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus (I Pet. 2:5). We present our bodies as living sacrifices, holy, acceptable to God. Such is our spiritual service (Rom. 12:1-2). Our best is in sincere service to God and man that is offered according to the expressed will of our Master (Matt. 25:40).

* You mention that your Catholic worship is like that of the angels worshiping God in heaven as pictured in Revelation. Surely you do not think that it is in any wise necessary to have the pomp and ceremonies of a cathedral to worship God acceptably. It was upwards of 300 years before the early Christians were able to have their own houses for worship. They met in homes, in caves, by river sides, etc.

* You say that no pope has ever promulgated a teaching or doctrine that was contrary to the Bible. Pope Innocent I and Leo I enjoined celibacy and Gregory VII, Hildebrand, was able to enforce it on all the servants of his church. Yet the Holy Spirit said that those who forbid to marry, have fallen away from the faith and give heed to doctrine of demons (I Tim. 4:1-3). The author of Hebrews said, "Let marriage be had in honor among all" (Heb. 13:4). The "all" would certainly include priests and nuns. Logically we could express this as follows:

1. Those teachers who forbid to marry are fallen away from the faith (I Tim. 4:1-3).
2. But Popes Innocent I, Leo I and other have forbidden servants of the church to marry.
3. Therefore those popes have fallen away from the faith.

* You mention that the institutional structures of Rome are necessary to maintain unity. I ask you, have there been no schisms in the Roman church? From the earliest days of her existence there have been those who turned away from Rome in sufficient numbers to be recognized as separate bodies. Long before the Protestant Reformation these departures (some based on conscience and Scripture, some on other factors) troubled Rome. Some were anathematized and others were persecuted for their departure. Among these were Donatists, Nestorians, the Photian Schism, etc. . Even within the ranks of the church of Rome there have been an unending series of controversies that were identified by observers as contending factions. Some of these were purely questions of doctrine or practice others were power struggles between various orders of the church.

* Thanks for your further explanation of your previous words. I took it that you meant the bishops had not adequately dealt with the reformers like Luther, Calvin and Zwingle. By the way, Fr. John. Tetzel was selling indulgences for the purpose of raising funds for the completion of St. Peter's church in Rome. He had the blessing of the Pope Julian to do so.

* We do not say that all must get married, only that all have the God-given right to marry (Heb. 13:4). No man has the right to forbid men to marry (I Tim. 4:1-3). Marriage is certainly the norm for humanity. Relatively few choose singleness of their own will.

* I certainly do not believe, nor did I say, that all celibate priests are immoral because of their state. But you must admit

the revelation of the wide-spread problem was a hard blow to the image of your church. Being forced to live celibate puts many people under a severe strain and leaves them vulnerable to temptations of the flesh. Yes, it is true men and women of all faiths, married and single, have fallen into sin. No church has a corner on sin.

* In our enlightened age, folks like you can understand that the bread and wine of communion are not literally the flesh and blood of Jesus. Yet in the past, fierce conflicts have been waged over that very issue. The whole idea of protecting the bread lest even a crumb fall to the floor and be eaten by mice, reflects the view the host, even before it was eaten, was considered more than just bread.

* We do not consider the church of Christ a denomination. Just as you do not consider your church to be such. Jesus purchased the church with his blood (Acts 20:28). He is the head and savior of the church (Eph. 1:22; 5:23). He has but one church which is his body (Eph. 4:4). His one church has no denominations. It consists of all those whom he saves and adds to his church (Acts 2:47; I Cor. 12:13). Anywhere in the world, there are saved people worshiping and serving God through Christ there is his one church. We strive to be Christians...nothing more nor less (Acts 11:26). As congregations of Christians we seek to do just what the Lord has revealed to us in his New Testament. We have no human name (such as Lutheran or Methodist), we are simply a church of Christ (Rom. 16:16). We have no humanly devised creed or standard for our churches, only the New Testament (John 12:48). As I mentioned in an earlier letter, I am very familiar with the early fathers of the church whose writings have survived to our day. I have the 24 volumes of **the Ante-Nicean, Nicean and Post-Nicean Fathers** on the shelves of my library. I have and have read many volumes on the early history of the faith. Yet while these are of great interest and historical value, we could be saved and worship and serve God acceptably if we never knew they existed. The New Testament is all-sufficient for the life, worship and work of Christ's church. The fathers were uninspired mortals just as we are. While they were closer in years to Christ and the Apostles than we, we have excellent tools of Biblical languages, church history and biblical research that they never knew. To reason that since the Ante-Nicean Fathers were nearer to the apostles than we, therefore we must recognize their teaching and practice as we would that in the Book of Acts, is like saying since Tom's shot was closer to the target than Bills, he should be given the prize. Only the man who hits the target can be a winner.

* You say your Catholic worship is just like that described by Justin. Yet he never saw a "sacred church building." He never saw a priest with gorgeous robes. He never saw a baptism by sprinkling or pouring. He never saw a Christian counting rosary beads or burning incense. There was no pope known and acknowledged by all the churches in the second century. He never knew of imposed celibacy. It interesting that I cited that very same reference from Justin in a recent article (written in July) to show my brethren that our worship follows the same pattern as that of the church in the second century.

Well, an interesting exchange. Together we stretch our minds and dig into God's Word to see if these things be so. That is what the Beareans did and Luke described them as noble men (Acts 17:11). Too bad we can't sit down to a cup of tea and discuss these matters. Have a wonderful evening of rest. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TENTH LETTER

Good morning, John! I am glad to continue our discussion. I truly read your comments with an open heart, even though we disagree on some things; and I'm sure you do the same. It often seems to come down to which verses we quote and how they are interpreted! I still see that as one of the problems with no authoritative body. Nothing in the Bible prevents God from giving us shepherds to guide the flock. Catholics see Christ as the head of the Church. The pope is a shepherd.

* One example of multiple interpretations of a verse is your mention of I Timothy 4:3 and Hebrews 13:4. The latter says that marriage should be honored by all. This means that we are to hold marriage up as a holy and sacred institution, and the marriage bed shall remain undefiled. You are stretching the word "honored". It does not mean that marriage needs to be practiced by all. (The Catholic Church certainly honors marriage!) As for the passage from First Timothy, this is speaking about rejecting--under the influence of demons--a gift that God has given, and yes, marriage is one of those. But it is not a gift to be used by all. You accuse the Catholic Church of forcing celibacy on priests and nuns. You should

realize that no one is forced to be a priest. The celibacy rule is not a dogma, by the way; it could be changed. But it is actually quite beautiful and upholds the sanctity of sex all the more! A priest gives up marriage as a gift to God and to the people that he ministers to. Perhaps you also overlooked Matthew 19:12, where Jesus recognizes that some sacrifice marriage (as "eunuchs") for the sake of the kingdom.

* The popes over the centuries have taught truth about the religion, including faith and morals. I once again emphasize the difference in this authoritative teaching office and their other decisions. Popes have officially denounced fornication since the time of Jesus, but there were probably more than a few that had illicit affairs.

As for the popes you mentioned, they did not *teach* forced celibacy to the universal church. The forced celibacy was enacted in their own household, and they can answer for that themselves on Judgement Day. I realize that some Protestants may say that this is convenient logic we use to rationalize troubles in Catholic history, but it is a very important point. If our current Pope Benedict got up in the balcony in St. Peter's Square and predicted the winner of the Kentucky Derby, I would first of all chuckle to myself, but then merely chalk it up as his personal opinion -- it is outside of his Petrine authority. You need to realize the distinction between infallibility and impeccability.

* Regarding the Catholic Church's image troubles: First, God's kingdom is not of this world, so it can be expected for the media to do all it can to make any Christian community look bad. But there certainly were scandals -- I sometimes think that the scandals were good in a way, since they can purge the Church of some of the weeds that have lurked among the wheat.

Now, I assume you are exaggerating when you envision priests that drive Mercedes. The average priest has sacrificed so much, and receives a salary of about \$14,000 (they usually do get free housing, though, in the rectory). Some bishops may still have "drivers" but that is not in itself a bad thing. (The priest doesn't cut the grass in front of the church; we have a maintenance man!)

As for "bejeweled" cathedrals, I again say that they are using God's gifts from the earth to praise Him. The early Christians did not have this because they were constantly afraid for their very lives! So yes, they met in homes, caves, etc. But that fact doesn't preclude fine decorations. Remember the Jewish passover meal: I suspect that Jesus used a fine-quality cup at the last supper. We are not prohibited from setting aside communion cups/plates as sacred. The Bible on my coffee table should not be ratty, but made of fine material and set aside from other books.

* I guess it is kind of amusing that we both referred to Justin's description of the early liturgy! John, I think you would not have too much of a problem if you were to observe a Catholic Mass. If you overlook the robes, candles, etc. that seem so bothersome, you would see the substance of our worship as very Christian. The first half is listening to the Bible readings along with the sermon, and the second half is the Communion service. There is singing (with instruments, though), and music is integral to our worship, especially the Psalms. The most problematic thing you might hear is that occasionally the priest may mention a saint if it is that saint's feast day, and he will ask that saint to pray for us, but then they move on with the rest of the Mass.

One question though: in reading Justin's description, did you notice that he refers to Communion as the "body and blood of Christ"? I think he also mentions the "altar of sacrifice". These phrases sound quite Catholic.

* Finally, I offer a sincere apology for referring to your community as a denomination. Understand that I did not do so in a condescending way. But thanks for the correction -- the RC Church has a similar viewpoint. We are all part of the Christian Church (there is only one Body of Christ, right?) even though we do not have perfect unity. Let's pray daily that we may be one.

All the best, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TENTH REPLY

Dear John B.: It is a pleasure to share this correspondence with you. I admire your good and honest heart.

* First may I say that we of the church of Christ do in fact have a distinct body of doctrine which is official for us. That of course is the New Testament of Christ. Jesus said, "All authority is given to me in heaven and on earth." Following the commission to go make disciples, baptizing them, he said, "teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:18-20). We are strictly warned not to go beyond the doctrine or teaching of Christ (II John 9). When I teach a class I open the Bible to the selected book, read and discuss the meaning thereof. When I preach I select a portion of Scripture and develop a lesson based on that teaching.

* As to the status of departed Christians, Paul wrote, "For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father, of whom every family in heaven and on earth is named..." (Eph. 3:14). God's spiritual family consists of those on the earth who have surrendered their lives to Jesus, those faithful Christians who have completed their lives on earth and are now in Abraham's bosom awaiting the coming of Christ and their resurrection. We should also add the holy angels. While we can revere the memory of those who went before us and profit from their labors, we cannot ask them to mediate for us. Paul clearly states, "For there is one God and one mediator also between God and men, himself man, Christ Jesus" (I Tim. 2:5). There is but one place in the Bible where a man sought help from a departed saint, the Rich Man of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. His plea was rejected (Luke 16:23-31). The Father bestowed the honor of being the mediator between himself and sinful man upon his Son who was as divine as his Father and as human as his mother Mary.

* You state the official Catholic position that to bow down before the image of and pray to a departed saint is not worship. Juan bows down before the image of Mary and prays, asking for her blessing and help. Juanita bows down before an image of Jesus and does the same. By your view Juanita worships but Juan only venerates. This is case of denying the obvious.

* You say that Catholics see Christ as the head of the church and the pope as a shepherd. Why then do all Catholics refer to the pope as the head of their church? You may see a difference, but not the average Catholic communicant.

* Remember that I made it clear that while none are obligated to be married, all do have the right to be married. That is the affirmation of Heb. 13:4. You say that celibacy is not obligatory, since no man is forced to be a priest. Yet all who feel drawn to serve as priests are officially denied the right to take a wife. Marriage is forbidden to them. That no man has the right to do, be he king or pope. Look again at Paul's words, "men shall depart from the faith...forbidding to marry" (I Tim. 4:1-3). No amount of rationalization can erase this apostolic rebuke. You state that celibacy is a beautiful thing...to see people married to Christ and living alone. But the tragic record is not so beautiful. We only know of the cases of abuse that were ferreted out by reporters and lawyers. How many went unreported? We know that many bishops sought to cover up and hide these unpleasant problems in their dioceses. Why is there so much unhappiness about forced celibacy in the ranks of the men and women who currently serve your church? Why have so many declined to make the commitment and others left the priesthood for a normal life with a mate? I say not this to embarrass you or magnify the human failures of some, but to point out the consequences of a binding practice that produces detrimental consequences. If a man wishes to live as an eunuch for the kingdom of heaven's sake that is his privilege (Matt. 19:12), but no man has the right to make that decision for him.

* As to the distinction you make between the popes' teaching that is true and infallible and that which is not, to the outsider it appears that this is a convenient way to explain when some pronouncement of a pope proves faulty or unworkable and must be revised or dropped. If it is acceptable and workable it is considered infallible. If along the way it become embarrassing or a burden, it can be treated as a non-binding teaching and changed. It looks a bit like the unchanging church rule about divorce. The little folks have to suffer with it, but the wealthy and powerful are able to secure an annulment.

* I admit I am incredulous when you say that Popes Innocent I, Leo I, etc & al did not teach that celibacy was binding up the priesthood. What would happen to any priest of your church today if he should announce to his congregation that he is taking a wife?

* I do know that the average priest does not drive a luxury car, but many years ago I did ride in one as the guest of the Bishop Neidergesses of Nashville. He spoke at our State Right to Life Convention. My point was that the luxury and wealth displayed in Catholic churches, while appealing to the senses of its leaders and worshipers, was not seen in Christ and his apostles, nor in the early churches.

* Regarding your Catholic worship. I have in days past, on several occasions, visited Sunday mass at a near by Catholic Church. I did so to see first hand how the services were conducted.

* As to Justin Martyr referring to the Lord's Supper as the body and blood of Christ, that in no way proves he thought them to be the real presence of your transubstantiation doctrine. We in churches of Christ frequently use that very language in our prayers or in comments regarding our communion. Yet we understand those words to have symbolic meaning rather than literal when so used.

* You need not apologize for referring to the Church of Christ as a denomination. I only sought to explain our position to you, not to rebuke you for so doing. You did not know and now you do, that is the value of our exchange. We are learning from the experience.

May God bless you and yours, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S ELEVENTH LETTER

Hello again! After golfing, I remember why I only do it once a year. I should stick to my other hobbies -- I also like biking and I play the piano whenever I can.

* Well, to jump back into our discussion, I would first like to establish the concept of intercessory prayer. You claim that "Juanita" and "Juan" are both performing worship -- you said to distinguish the two "is a case of denying the obvious." First, let's establish that there is nothing wrong with statues or pictures themselves. I presume you agree that the Ten Commandments prohibited idolatry of images, not the images themselves. (Recall that we all have pictures of family members around the house, but that doesn't mean that we worship the picture, nor the family members.)

Now, does the Bible condemn the act of "bowing" as a sign of deference or respect? Not if we read Joshua 5:14 and Daniel 8:17. You would also say that to curtsy before the Queen of England is not to worship. So let's not judge the outward actions of the Catholics in question, but instead examine their intent: To worship God is to acknowledge that He is the supreme being and we as His creatures are to worship Him alone. To pray to a saint is NOT worship. It is acknowledging an elder brother or sister who has finished the race, so to speak, and to ask them to present our intentions before God's throne. We can do this in addition to direct prayer to God.

If you still don't see the difference, let's take a common Protestant (and Catholic) practice of praying for each other. Hasn't a member of your congregation ever shared with you a difficulty, and then asked for you to pray? Is that person worshipping you by asking for your prayers?

Here again we see the problem with isolating a Bible verse and interpreting it in a certain way. You mentioned I Tim. 2:5. By your interpretation of that verse, you should rebuke the congregant who asks for you as the pastor to pray for him! This brings up an obvious inconsistency in that you believe intercessory prayer is fine for those on earth, but as soon as a Christian dies, he can no longer pray for us.

* As for celibacy, I again say that no one is forced to be a priest. If a pope said that "all Christians with blue eyes are prohibited from marriage" then we could discuss forced celibacy. In fact, that would be eugenics, a terribly evil policy. Also, remember that celibacy is not a dogma of the faith, but a man-enacted practice. It is similar to the Catholic practice of abstaining from meat of the Fridays of Lent. There is nothing intrinsically bad about meat, and that policy could be

changed. But it is a practice invoked to have the Church flow in one direction, similar to a national day of prayer and fasting for our country.

* You interpret Justin's words for him by going outside of the actual words. According to his **First Apology**, 66:20, Justin says that Communion is "the food which has been made into the Eucharist by the Eucharistic prayer set down by him, and by the change of which our blood and flesh is nourished, is both the flesh and blood of that incarnated Jesus." Powerful words, and I admit that this concept is certainly a mystery, just like the Trinity is a mystery! Any Christian who tries to understand the Trinity will be confounded every time. Similarly, Communion can be the body and blood of Jesus, but not symbolically, and not physically either. There's no shame in saying that we cannot fully comprehend this. I was in Tempe this past March, and if my business travels ever take me there again, I would enjoy taking you up on that cup of tea. It would be great to meet and discuss the many things that we DO agree on!

Your friend, John B.

JOHN WADDEY'S ELEVENTH REPLY

Dear John B: It is always a pleasure to read your letters and share with you my thoughts regarding the most important things of life.

* As to one Christian praying for another, that we are encouraged to do by the sacred writers (Jas. 5:16). Never do we find an example of a Christian praying to a departed saint or bowing in prayer and devotion before a sacred image or picture. The difference in Christians praying for each other and to departed saints is evident from a reading of Christ's will. Intercession is prescribed for us while the role of mediator is reserved for Christ. He is the Father's designated representative to humanity. He is equally human and divine, thus uniquely qualified to represent us before his Father and our God in heaven.

* We do agree that a statue or a painting is not sinful in itself, even if that depicted is of a sacred scene or individual. I have in my office shelf size copies of Michael Angelo's Moses and the Pieta. While admiring their artistic beauty and their creator's great skills as a sculptor, I do not bow before them nor pray to them. Therein lies our difference.

* As to your question about a curtsy before a queen, we both agree such is not worship. But to bow in worship is another thing. Remember when Cornelius bowed before Peter he was corrected. When John bowed before the angel who had brought God's message to him, he was forbidden to do so (Acts 10:25; Rev. 22:8-9).

* One reason God forbade the Hebrews from making and bowing down before graven images was the primitive urge that seems to reside in the human heart to have some visible representation of that which he worships. Idolatry is a subtle thing. It can occur in a hundred different forms. Many are idolaters who would never think of themselves as such. The conduct of some people toward movie stars, entertainers, and athletes demonstrates this. Others in our society are practicing idolatrous nature worship in the name of ecology and conservation. They attribute spiritual attributes to trees, rivers, animals, spectacular scenic places. So to bow before the image of Mary, the apostles or some notable disciple of Christ is wrong for that very reason, it leads the indiscriminating mind to give worshipful adoration to the image of the departed person. This is very evident in the adoration of Mary among the people of Mexico. I observed pilgrims kissing the statue of Peter in St. Peter's Cathedral. This worshipful adoration of Mary is most visible in the rush of devotees to pray before statues that allegedly weep, of her image being seen in the bark of a tree, in a shadow on a wall, or in the rust pattern on a piece of metal, or on a cookie or potato chip.

* Consider this, if God wanted to tell you that Christ was one and only designated mediator between humanity and himself, what would it take to convince you? For the devout and obedient soul, one statement from be sufficient (I Tim. 2:5).

* Now if celibacy is merely a man-initiated practice that really is non-binding, why do the popes adamantly refuse to loosen the requirement of that for priests and nuns? For generations servants of your church have implored the hierarchy to do this...all to no avail. The man or woman who dares to break the rule by marrying is no longer allowed to serve in their office!

* Justin Martyr was without doubt a great and good man, but, separated from the apostles by a generation, his uninspired ideas cannot trump the words of the Scripture writers who were moved by the Holy Spirit (II Pet. 1:21). Christ and Paul both describe our participation in the communion as a remembrance of his crucified body and his shed blood (Luke 22:19; I Cor. 11:24-26). Christ himself explained what he meant by "eat my flesh and drink my blood." He went on to say, "It is the spirit that giveth life; the flesh profiteth nothing; the words that I have spoken unto you are spirit, and they are life" (John 6:53; 63).

By all means, should you chance to be coming to the Phoenix area, let me know ahead of time and we shall break bread together.

Respectfully, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWELFTH LETTER

I was out of town for a few days for work, but I'm back now and glad to respond once again.

* Regarding celibacy, you ask: "If celibacy is merely a man-initiated practice that really is non-binding, why do the popes adamantly refuse to loosen the requirement of that for priests and nuns?" I have two answers: First, because it is accepted as one of the conditions when priests and nuns **voluntarily** take their vows! My wife is not to go on dates with other men, but was that forced on her? No -- it was her choice to accept me and not date others as one of the conditions of the married state. Secondly, as for the celibacy rule being changed, that could happen someday. But it wouldn't apply to those who live under the current vows. If I get a ticket for running a stop sign, and then two weeks later the stop sign is removed by the traffic department, will the judge let me off the hook? No -- there were terms existing at the time, and the fact that the terms changed later doesn't matter. If you cannot see the difference, then I honestly don't know what else to say!

* It is true that God forbade the Hebrews from bowing down to graven images because of that primitive urge to have a visible representation of that which we worship. Since the incarnation, however, Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and He is the only visible being that is worthy of worship. (I know you and I agree on all that.) So we are still forbidden from worshipping idols, images, etc. Therefore, Catholics cannot and do not worship images. We use them as visual reminders of those that persevered to the end and thus whom we love. If you are still unconvinced, then I presume you also have problems with a soldier at the front who kisses a picture of his wife before going to bed each night.

* Now, you made an interesting statement: "Intercession is prescribed for us while the role of mediator is reserved for Christ." I totally agree. When I ask my neighbor to pray for a sick family member, I am asking for intercession. When I ask a saint to pray for me, I am asking for intercession. You infer that just because the saint is on the other side, that my request for intercession has somehow turned to worship. And you say that we are not directed to do so explicitly by the Bible, but at the risk of sounding petty, neither does it prohibit such.

* So, if you think that intercessory prayer is OK (and indeed it is recommended) then you understand the difference between mediation as given in I Tim. 2:5 and this type of intercession. Perhaps you are skittish because we are making requests to someone that is unseen. I can understand that. But to speak to an unseen person with a request for intercessory prayer is not worship.

* In the past you held up Justin as an example of good early Christian worship, but now you are distancing yourself from him (saying that he was "separated from the apostles by a generation...his uninspired ideas..." etc.). I then have a

question. If you think that authentic Christianity went underground for 1500 years while Roman influence corrupted the visible Church, where are your early writers that interpret the New Testament as you now do? Your attempt to stick to the correct interpretation of the Bible is worthy, but you have to shun so many witnesses that defended the faith! We both agree that the Bible has to be interpreted in the correct way, so are there writings from the second or third century that tell us to not pray for deceased Christians, or that the Eucharist is merely a symbol of the body and blood of Jesus, or that Mary is not the mother of God? These and numerous other ideas were explained in detail by early Christians, and they do not contradict scripture.

I do not mean this in a confrontational way (you know my style by now) but it does seem puzzling to overlook such exegetes as Augustine, Ignatius of Antioch, Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius, and later, Thomas Aquinas. Of course, because they were not inspired, these men certainly wrote things that the Catholic Church would not endorse. (Such as various theories about "ensoulment" of an embryo.) But it's still a daunting group to take on when discussing such fundamental issues as apostolic authority or the Eucharist as body and blood. So is there a corollary list of thinkers that defended Protestant ideas from the beginning?

Wishing you a great weekend... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWELFTH REPLY

Dear Friend John B: So good to hear from you again. My apologies for being late in responding, but other duties have kept me occupied till now.

* You stress that priests and nuns voluntarily take their vow of celibacy, submitting not because it is a law but that which they choose to do. In reality this is only partially correct. They have no option. If they wish to serve their church in the capacity of priest or nun, they must take the vow. If they should ever change their mind, they must cease to fill their sacred office. This is a man-made law. It is tenaciously held even though the Holy Spirit guided the Apostle Paul to say it was evidence that men had departed from the faith (I Tim. 4:1-3).

* It is true that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, but no man alive today has the foggiest idea what Jesus looked like. All we have is the various representation of thousands of artists. God forbade his worshipers to make a graven image representing him telling them, "for ye saw no manner of form on the day that Jehovah spake unto you in Horeb...lest ye corrupt yourselves, and make you a graven image in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female..." (Deut. 4:15-16). Think of it this way. The Father allows no image to be used in worshiping him...including those of men or women. Jesus shares the divine nature with the Father. He too is God (John 1:1). His New Covenant incorporates the prohibition of idolatry (I John 5:21). It seem most reasonable that we continue the ancient practice of having no graven images in our worship of the Father and the Son. Have you pondered how it must seem to the idolater in India or Africa when he reads in the Bible that he is not to make a graven image or bow down to it, but he visits a Catholic mission and sees the priests and worshipers bowing down to images of Mary, Jesus and other saints? To expect the poor fellow to see a difference is unreasonable. When you see a man bowing and praying to an image then protesting that such is not worship, remember that "The easiest person to deceive is oneself." Images and worship.

* Concerning the rightness or wrongness of praying to departed saints, your final point, was "but neither does the Bible forbid it." In this thought lies a profound difference between the Church of Christ and the Roman Catholic Church and most even of the Protestant bodies. There are two approaches to determining God's will. One says, I must do what God's Word says and nothing more. The other says, I can do anything the Bible does not forbid. This difference in approach demonstrates a marked difference in the place of the Bible in the life of a people. We hold that since Christ has "all authority in heaven and on earth" (Matt. 28:18), he knows what he wants from his people. The Holy Spirit was thoroughly capable of providing for us a written and understandable communication that tells what to do. That is why we are straitly warned not to go beyond the teaching of Christ (II John 9). I like the translation of your New American Bible, "Anyone who is so progressive that he does not remain rooted in the teaching Christ does not possess God, while anyone who remains rooted in the teaching possesses both the Father and the Son." The other approach allows sinful men to introduce into the worship and practice of the church anything Christ did not specifically forbid. The possibility

for abuse is enormous.

* Looking at my **Catholic Encyclopedia** (1910 edition) I discover that in the author's mind there is no distinction between intercession and mediation. "In ecclesiastical usage both words are taken in the sense of intervention primarily of Christ, and secondarily of the Blessed Virgin." He does concede, "It would be better, however, to restrict the word mediation to the action of Christ, and intercession to the action of the Blessed Virgin, the angels, and the saints" (Vol. 8, p. 70). The writer goes on to note, "it is lawful to say: 'St. Peter, pity me, save me, open for me the gate of heaven...'" (p. 71). The author, T. B. Scannell concedes, "We readily admit that the doctrine of the intercession of the saints is a development from the teaching of Scriptures and that the practice is open to abuse..." (p. 72). While he struggles to find Scripture approval for the practice his greatest support comes from the writings of the post apostolic fathers (p. 71).

* You ask why I cite Justin Martyr on some occasions and reject him on others. The answer is simple. When his message is in harmony with the teachings and practices of the inspired writers, I can rely on him as illustrating or reinforcing what they (apostles) said or did. When his writing reflects departure from the divine standard I ignore or reject him. It is the same standard I use with the **Catholic Encyclopedia**, Bible commentaries by scholars of many different faiths, and other reference volumes.

* As I mentioned before I have the entire set of the **Ante, Nicean and Post Nicean Fathers**. In addition I have many biographical studies of these great men. I am an avid student of church history and a large selection of my library is devoted to church history. One thing is most evident. The farther those writers were from the inspired men in years, the farther they were from them in their teaching and practice. I am reminded of Paul warnings, "The Spirit saith expressly that in later times, some shall fall away from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons..." (I Tim. 4:1). Thomas Aquinas I find to be the most unedifying of all. The Roman church, which did not emerge as the dominant power in the church until some 400 years after the apostles, reaches back and claims all when went before her as her legitimate children and supporters. Her claim does not substantiate the fact.

You have a good day. I thoroughly enjoy each letter you send. I trust you will receive mine as I do yours.

Yours in hope of heaven, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S THIRTEENTH LETTER

Hi John -- Once again, thank you for the good wishes and the stimulating comments. I know my reply is relatively quick today, but that's because work is quite slow and I'm home checking email. Don't feel bad if your emails take a few days! I think it's great that we can both take time out of our usual duties to keep the communication going. I do indeed try to really hear what you're saying and then formulate a response.

* Celibacy: Yes, I concur that it is a man-made law; but that fact itself does not make it wrong. It has simply been made law because it has been deemed to be the best for priests. Paul says so explicitly in I Corinthians 7:32 --"He that is unmarried cares for things of the Lord." This is not to say that married people don't care for things of the Lord, but rather a married man has responsibility for a family and might not be able to minister to his other "family" in as deep a manner. Earlier in that same chapter, Paul praises those that are unmarried "as I am." So I'm sure you see the good reasons why the RC Church upholds celibacy for priests, but you don't think that it should be a requirement.

* Images: Yes, I think any Catholic will agree with you (and the **Catholic Encyclopedia** which you quote) that there is a danger in being perceived as worshipping a statue. But that does not mandate doing away with images. I was interested in your response to the soldier who kisses a picture (image) of his wife. Would you say that this is OK? Perhaps because it is in private? There is a definite distinction between using images to think about a loved one, and worshipping that image. As for the fellow in India or Africa, the Christian missionary must educate him about the difference!

* Intercessory prayer: I do understand your response, but I still have the question: Why do you have a problem with

asking a Christian in heaven for intercessory prayer, but not a Christian here on earth? What is it about death that makes a neighbor incapable of praying for you any longer?

* When I said that asking saints for intercession is not prohibited in the Bible, I was somewhat tongue-in-cheek; I knew that would get your attention, and I was not serious. But it goes back to one of our fundamental issues: you take direction in all matters from the Bible only. You stated that "the Holy Spirit was thoroughly capable of providing for us a written and understandable communication that tells what to do." That's not true, or we would not have thousands of Christian groups teaching various interpretations about various passages! Look at a few of the topics we've covered just in our dialogue: Infant baptism -- you claimed that baptizing households excluded children. How are you so sure? In Colossians 2, St. Paul says that baptism has replaced circumcision (neither of which requires conscious assent -- the faith of a baby can be upheld by a parent, such was the case for the servant in Matt 8:5-13). Another example is the Eucharist as body and blood -- you interpret Jesus saying "my flesh is real food" to mean that the bread at Communion is not really his flesh. I don't mean to re-open these items, but I think they illustrate that good Christians can interpret the Bible quite differently.

* This brings up another issue, then. It's great that you seem very open to reading non-biblical writings, especially from the early Church. But what happens is that you then become the judge of what squares with the Bible and what doesn't. This self-authority is what has led to so much division. (I don't mean to pick on you personally, but I speak of Protestantism in general.) Martin Luther experienced this first-hand. He became his own "pope" in a sense. Then when others disagreed with him about theological topics, he at first was surprised, but then realized that they had just as much "authority" as he did, and thus the splintering continued.

I'll sign off here -- I keep telling myself to keep these emails concise, but that is not often the case! Maybe we can probe some new topics next time...

Wishing you all the best, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY 'S THIRTEENTH REPLY

Good morning John B: Last week we were away on vacation so I am just now getting around to answering your last letter.

* You concede that celibacy "is a man-made law." It is not God-given. All authority in heaven and on earth was invested in Christ (Mat. 28:18). But Christ did not bind celibacy on those who serve him. For any man or group of men to make this a law for the church is an act of presumption against the authority of the founder, head and savior of the church. Paul's statement in I Cor. 7:32, "He that is unmarried cares for the things of the Lord," is set forth as a personal choice that one may make as a Christian. You must not overlook his opening remark, "But because of fornications, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband." "Each man and each woman" includes those who wish to serve God as spiritual leaders. Is there no correlation between the forced celibacy of the priests and the terrible scandals that have rocked your church in the last few years?

* You concede that there is the danger that in praying before statues of saints that such might be perceived as worship. But it is more than mere perception. It is clearly doing what God has said not to do. "Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image,...thou shalt not bow down thyself unto them...for I, Jehovah, thy God, am a jealous God..." (Deut. 5:8). It is often the case that people seek to deny the wrongfulness of their conduct by using different words to describe it. Hedonists don't like to call their immorality fornication, they call it making love. Abortionists don't want to acknowledge they are killing unwanted babies, they are practicing freedom of choice. A liar insists he is just kidding, or that his lie is just a "little white lie." So those who bow down and pray before images say we are not bowing and worshipping before a graven image, we are just using them to help us pray. As to the soldier who kisses the picture of his dear wife, he is not worshipping her. I am sure you can see the difference between fond remembrance and worship. This is the old case of apples and oranges.

* You ask why I have a problem with asking a Christian in heaven for intercessory prayer, but not a Christian here on earth? In all of this discussion I think you can see that we have two totally different approaches to serving God through Christ. For me, I feel duty bound to do what Christ tells me to do, for the reason he said to do it and in the way he prescribed for me to do it. There is only one place where I can determine what Christ's will for my life is, and that is his New Testament. I am straitly warned neither to add to nor to take from that sacred book which he has provided for me (Rev. 22:18-19) and not to go beyond the teaching of Christ (II John 9-11). Your view is that the Bible is only one of several sources of information by which you frame your religious beliefs and actions. Several times you have asked in effect, "Where does the Bible forbid this practice?" For me, I ask, "Where does Christ authorize this practice?" When your doctor writes a prescription for you, the pharmacist is expected to comply with what is written. To do otherwise might bring harm rather than healing to you. He would be dead wrong to reason, "Well the doctor did not forbid me to add this other ingredient or medication." So in matters of faith. Christ knows what he wants us to do. That he has revealed in his Testament. Rather than trying to circumvent that by saying, "Well, he did not forbid me to do thus and so," the faithful disciple will, like Samuel, say, "Speak Lord, thy servant heareth." Since we have no divinely given instruction or example of Christians praying to departed saints, we do not do so.

* You ask how am I so sure that babies need not be baptized? 1. There is no bible example of them being baptized. 2. They cannot meet the prior requirements of faith (Mark 16:16), repentance (Acts 2:38) and confession (Rom 10:9-10) before their baptism. 3. They have no personal sins that need to be washed away in baptism (Acts 22:16).

* You misread Col. 2:10-13. Paul does not say that baptism has replaced circumcision. He draws his illustration from a common aspect of the two practices. In physical circumcision, the tad of flesh was cut off and the child was thus recognized as member of the covenant family. In baptism our sins are cut off and we are made members of Christ's covenant family. But the prior requirements of faith, repentance and confession make baptism something that only those old enough to make a personal decision are qualified to receive.

* While it is true that "good Christians" can interpret the Bible quite differently that does not excuse us when we refuse to accept or obey that about which there is no doubt. When two people arrive at different understandings of a certain Biblical passage, the possibilities are: one or the other may be wrong, or both may be wrong. God's word does not contradict itself. The postmodern view that truth resides in each man's heart, thus both can be right while coming to different conclusions is likewise false. Just as two or ten pharmacists can read and fill a doctor's prescription and arrive at the same conclusions, it is possible for two or more people to come to a common understanding of God's will for their lives.

* When I read anything that men have written, be they religious or secular, I use the mind, the education and experience God has given me to determine whether they are correct or incorrect, true or false. You do the same. The Bible I assume to be true since it is from God, unique among all other books. It I seek to correctly understand, but never am I inclined to reject it as wrong!

* You note the Protestants have often divided. First you cannot deny that Catholicism has had her disputes, divisions and separations. Remember the "Great Schism" with the Greek churches. More recently men like Hans Kung have led movements that were considered to be divisive. You have "pro-choice" Catholics and "Old Latin" churches that are non-conformists. Second, when Protestants so disagree that they cannot continue in fellowship, they are content that each group goes its separate way, leaving it up to God to decide who is right and who is wrong. In the past such freedom was not granted by the leaders of the Catholic church. Dissenters were persecuted unto death, in the name of preserving an undivided church.

Well enough for today. I hope you have a good day and a good week. God be with you. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S FOURTEENTH LETTER

Good evening John: A few nights ago I went to hear a round-table discussion at a local Christian college, and they had a panel of representatives from different traditions (Baptist, Church of Christ, Salvation Army, Catholic, and a Messianic rabbi). The Church of Christ representative was Rubel Shelly, a professor at the college. I mention this event for two reasons: First, I found it especially interesting because they echoed some of the same things we have said here! Secondly, Dr. Shelly stated that for many years he lived in the Nashville area as a religion professor (working at Vanderbilt, I believe). I mention this in case there's a small chance that you may have heard of him.

Anyway, let's see if I can straighten out a few things. Regarding celibacy, I am glad you see the benefits of celibacy, and I do hear you loud and clear that you think it is forced on them, in violation of biblical teaching. Yet I still disagree, and it's not just a matter of twisting words. First, the fact that something is a man-made law doesn't make it wrong. That is precisely why I've said before that celibacy is changeable! (Every church has customs it creates for various reasons, and we need not go looking for sinister motives every time.) I have stated several times that celibacy is not divine law, but one enacted by the successors of the Apostles for various reasons. One is taken from Paul's epistles, which we have already discussed (II Cor. 7:32). Another reason is that it allows the priest to serve his people better. Priests are celibate, but they certainly have a family: I get called in the middle of the night by my crying child (not so much, now that they are 6 and 8), and a priest may be also called by someone in the middle of the night who is sick or dying. A third reason has to do with the Jewish custom of offering sacrifice. As you may know, the priests of the Old Testament were forbidden from marital relations for a period of time before offering the sacrifice in the Temple. New Testament priests today offer the sacrifice at Mass in a parallel manner. (A priest does NOT re-sacrifice Jesus at each Mass; rather, he makes present the once-for-all sacrifice of Calvary.) As for the forcing of celibacy, I again say that no one is "forced" to be celibate. It is a condition of those who choose to be priests. I may have used this analogy before, but think of the similar case of marriage: a woman is not "forced" to stop dating other men. Yet it is a condition she accepts when she chooses to enter marriage. Apparently, you would say this is forced monogamy. So the priest's foregoing a wife is exactly the same.

* You say that a soldier kissing a picture is OK. Yet if I kiss a crucifix, I am now worshipping that image? Forgive me -- I really am trying to understand your perspective. I am sure many Protestants share the Catholic custom of kissing the Bible before or after reading from it. We are not worshipping the paper and ink, but instead, we are honoring what it represents: the Word of God. The same with a picture or a crucifix.

* Also, you mention one of the Commandments: Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image. But isn't this the same God who commanded that the Ark be adorned with graven cherubim (most likely some sort of human-headed winged lions)? How can we reconcile this? Well, images in and of themselves are not the problem. So I will say what I've said all along: if someone worships an image itself, it is a grave sin. Therefore, Catholics are not to worship images. But I am allowed to kiss my Bible and crucifix, just as the soldier kisses the photo.

* On the point of intercessory prayer, you asked me by what authority I can ask those in heaven to pray for me, while you restrict that to only the earth-bound. Well, it's the same authority that gave you the Bible! Recall that Jesus did not hand the world the Bible; he gave the world human instruments to proclaim the good news ("He who hears you, hears me"). When the Apostles were called to heaven, successors were elected. Those successors continued to teach. Over time the books of the New Testament were agreed upon. (I know we've covered this before, but bear with me.) I think here is where we diverge. You claim that once the New Testament was established as Scripture, these successors suddenly lost their authority, being replaced by a book. I would say that the bishops have continued in their authority of proclaiming the good news, with the New Testament as the written basis for what we believe. The rich splendor of the Gospel can certainly be supplemented by the God-given authoritative body in a harmonious manner.

* I like your example of a doctor's prescription. You say the pharmacist has to do what is written. Yes, but why? Because he accepts the doctor as the authority, not the prescription itself. If the doctor were to later call the pharmacist and say "make sure John takes that with a glass of water" would the pharmacist say "Nope -- it's not on the prescription!" Of course not. The oral instruction works together with the written instruction. This is clearly stated in 2 Thess. 2:15. So it may sound flippant to say "the Bible doesn't teach that" but I would ask you where in the Bible you are told that these

27 books, along with the OT, are to be your only authority? There is no such verse.

* I do agree with you that "God's word does not contradict itself" and "the postmodern view that truth resides in each man's heart" is false. Yet, one of the negative effects of Protestantism is that a pastor can take one verse and misinterpret it. Another pastor can interpret it differently. Yet only one is correct, or as you said, they could both be wrong. Nowadays, thousands of people shop around for a church that suits their likings; sometimes it is based on the music, but often it's based on the pastor's teachings about hot-button moral issues. Isn't that precisely what you labeled as postmodern relativism?

* The Catholic Church cannot keep people from walking away. Dissenters like Hans Kung are indeed divisive, and they are encouraged to reconcile with Christ's church, if they would so desire. This reminds me of the question, "What is truth?" In a math class, for example, suppose a teacher teaches that $6 \times 4 = 24$. But Billy insists that this restricts his liberty, and he insists that $6 \times 4 = 28$. He is placing himself outside of the truth! Similarly, a pro-choice Catholic is outside of truth, but is welcome to come back to class if he is willing to listen to the teacher. To whine and cry about defined dogmas is an expression of the postmodern relativism that you hit on the head. Catholic Christians can be guilty of this, but it's not the Church's fault, is it?

* If you think we may have exhausted our usual topics, I can offer a couple of new topics. First, may I ask what you do in your Christian tradition when someone has died? Since I presume you do not accept purgatory, it is of no use for you to pray for the deceased at the funeral. Do you speak as if they are definitely in heaven? (I'm not "setting you up" for a debate, although we can discuss purgatory if you wish!) I ask this because I have heard Protestants say "may he rest in peace" but to me that sounds like a mini-prayer for the deceased to go to heaven.

* Finally, here's another topic that I can't believe we haven't touched on: Mary! Allow me to ask this: Would you accept the honorary title of Mary as the "Mother of God"? Catholics say this, not to worship her, but as an affirmation of her special role in salvation history.

Well, I have rambled on because I get passionate about these things, but these are the important things, right? As Christians we should feel this way, of course always in a respectful manner. But next time I'll try to keep it shorter!
John B.

Just a quick follow-up to last night's email...

When I explain Catholic beliefs, I hope I don't come across as arrogant or intolerant of other views. Near the end of my email, perhaps I sounded harsh in speaking of people who disagree with our beliefs. But I was only referring to those who claim to be Catholic but pick and choose what they accept (people such as Fr. Kung, Charles Curran, Ted Kennedy, and John Kerry).

I would not lump Protestants into that group. Non-Catholic Christians do not try to be part of the RC Church, and that's OK -- they are seeking the truth with an honest heart. But a politician who says that he personally is against abortion but then supports such murder is dishonest (or in serious need of remedial religious education).

I don't consider Protestants as being outside of Christ's Church. I would say they are within the fold (any baptized Christian has been initiated as such) although they are not in perfect union with the visible Church. I know you would disagree with that statement, but I only say it so that you will know that I consider you a brother in Christ.

So yes, perhaps if the lukewarm Catholics would stop setting such a bad example, there wouldn't be so many divisions within our Church. The actual teachings of Catholicism, when proclaimed without distortion or prejudice, are quite beautiful and in harmony with the Gospel.

John B.

JOHN WADDEY'S FOURTEENTH REPLY

Dear John B: Good to hear from you again. I apologize for being tardy in responding but I was away from home a couple of days and my work schedule was full to the brim.

* Yes, I know Rubel Shelly well. In fact I have known him for some 35 years.

* Concerning celibacy, while there are some who can better serve Christ while unmarried, Paul made it clear that because of man's need for sexual fulfillment, "let each man have his own wife and each woman have her own husband" (I Cor. 7:2). When this sacred wisdom is ignored and servants are forced to lived celibate or else not serve God in leadership roles, disaster often occurs.

* You say that just because something is a man-made law it is not necessarily wrong. Men can make laws in the secular realm. They can make laws for their private lives, homes and businesses, but no man has the right to make laws for God's church. Christ has been given "all authority" (Matt. 28:18). It is his exclusive prerogative to set the standards for his church. Neither does any man have the right to make and bind laws on the conscience of other Christians. Christ gives us freedom (Gal. 5:1) To our Master alone we must answer for our actions as Christians (Rom. 14:4).

* Yes, every church has customs created for various reasons. Customary ways of doing things are the way we implement the law of Christ revealed in his word. Paul says, when we put our customs or traditions before those of the Lord and his Apostles, we are walking disorderly (II Thess. 3:6). Jesus said, "ye have made void the word of God because of your tradition....in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men" (Matt. 15:9).

* As to the sacrifice of the Mass: (See Waddey's letter immediately following this one).

* In response to my use of Moses' prohibition against images, you ask, did not God command the ark to be adorned with a cherubim? The answer is Yes, God did that. The difference is, He is God. As our Creator, Law-giver and Judge he has the right to tell us what to do. He himself has the right to order the cherubim on his mercy seat just as he has the right to destroy a wicked man or even a wicked nation. Remember too they were not put there to be worshiped. They reminded the Hebrews that mercy and forgiveness could only be found at the place where the cherubim dwell. This is an allusion to God's throne in heaven, around which the cherubim wait to praise him and do his bidding (Rev. 4:2-9).

* You say when the apostles died, successors were elected to replace them. Now the Bible clearly states that Judas the apostate betrayer of Christ was replaced (Acts 1:15-26). Can you show me where any other apostle was replaced? James the brother of John was executed by Herod (Acts 12:1-2), but we read of no election to choose a successor! Jesus promised the apostles that they would sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matt. 19:28). The heavenly city has twelve foundations on which are engraved the names of the twelve apostles (Rev. 21:14). Jesus chose the twelve, trained and commissioned them to establish and nurture his church after his departure. The church was built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). Judas was replaced because he disgraced his office and died an apostate. Such was not true of the others. Paul was an apostle, extraordinary. He himself always made that distinction between himself and the twelve. Popes and bishops indeed are chosen to replace Roman Catholic popes and bishops before them. But a giant chasm exists between them and the apostles of Christ who continue to rule over his church through their inspired teaching they bequeathed to the church. If each pope is a successor to Peter, think how many thrones there would be around the throne in heaven, or how many foundations to the heavenly city.

* You say the pharmacist respects the doctor who wrote it, but not the prescription itself? Are you then saying that your church respects Christ but not his Word? Why do you read the Bible? Why do your priests use it in their rituals when it is not treated as the authoritative word of Jesus? If as you say, the pope, the living voice of the church, and the traditions of Catholicism are equally sacred and authoritative with the Bible, could you not get along just as well without the Bible?

* You ask, where does the Bible say the 27 New Testament books and the 39 Old Testament books are our only authority? I could ask you where does the Bible mention the following: The Roman Catholic Church, popes, cardinals,

mass, sacraments, nuns, counting beads, images, sacred relics, clergy garments, and scores of other things essential to your religion? You might ponder such for a while. Now as to the Scriptures, it is true that Jesus does not say, "You shall have 27 books in your New Testament, or that we should honor the 39 books of the Old Testament. But the careful student of the Bible notes the following: Jesus honored the canon of the Old Testament that was used by the Hebrews of his day. He said to the Jews, "there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, on whom ye have set your hope. For if ye believed Moses, ye would believe me; for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?" (John 5:45-46). Jesus opened the minds of the apostles that they might understand that "all things which are written in the law of Moses, and the prophets and the psalms" concerning him must be fulfilled (Luke 24:44-45). He tells us, that His words will judge us in the last day (John 12:48). He charged the apostles to teach us "all things whatsoever he commanded" (Mat. 28:20). He promised them the Holy Spirit would bring to their remembrance all that he had taught them and guide them into all the truth (John 14:26; 16:13). Paul declared that the things he wrote were the commands of the Lord (I Cor. 14:37). Paul warned the church about forgeries that would claim to be from him (II Thess. 2:1-3). From this we can draw the valid conclusion that our 66 books of Scripture are inspired of God and the sacred authority for our faith and worship.

* True, some Protestants shop around for a church that pleases them but so do Catholics. Some want Latin services, some want services in their vernacular. Some want folk music, some want high church music. Some want social activism and some do not. Some want a priest that is permissive about abortion and feminism, others want one who is not. They shop for a church that pleases them. The fact is, every one should shop for a church that follows Christ as his Word directs and then serve him with faithfulness.

* Perhaps you have noticed that the Bible says nothing about purgatory. Jesus did teach us that when death occurs two possible destinies await the deceased. Those who are righteous are carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom, a place of happiness and rest. Those who are wicked to dispatched to a place described as torment. (Luke 16:19-31). The departed are described as conscious of their surroundings and even of those in the opposite camp. They are yet concerned with things in the land of the living. A great gulf separates them and cannot be crossed. There the dead will wait until Christ returns to raise the dead (John 5:28-29). At that time all will come forth and receive a body that is suitable for eternal existence (I Cor. 15:35-55). We shall then stand before the judgment seat of Christ and receive the things done in this body (II Cor. 5:10). The righteous will be invited to spend their eternity with the Father and the Savior in heaven, the wicked will be cast into hell, a place of eternal punishment (Matt. 25:37,41, 46). Like Stephen, we commonly say, "Lord Jesus receive his spirit" (Acts 7:59) or words to that effect. We do not pray to the dead, nor do we think our prayers can change the destiny of the dead who have died with unforgiven sin.

* While we highly respect Mary the mother of the Lord Jesus, we do not use the honorary title, "Mother of God." I understand that she is the mother of Jesus who is God, just as his Father was, but Scripture does not refer to her in such words. Also it is confusing to the uninitiated and likely to many ordinary Catholics. The impression is that she is God's mother (that would include God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit). We know that is not the case. Such careless terminology has given occasion to many ordinary Catholics to give more than the deserved respect to Mary.

* Be assured that I do not interpret your affirmations as arrogant or intolerant. I read them as a man who is seeking to explain and defend that which he believes to be God's will for his life. I hope you see mine the same, for they are.

Have a great weekend. Stay safe. I am your literary friend, John Waddey

Dear Friend John B: When preparing my last reply I left a space after introducing the subject of the mass, intending to do some research before responding. Hurrying to get the letter off to you, I forgot to get the information typed in on the mass. So I offer my findings on that important subject.

* I had observed, based on Hebrews 10:12 that Christ was offered as our sacrifice, once for all: "but he, when he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God..." You responded that the mass is only a symbolic sacrifice. In my reading I have come up with the following information from Catholic authorities. First from the **Catholic Encyclopedia**, Vol 10, (1911) p. 6:

"The word Mass (missa) first established itself as the general designation for the Eucharistic Sacrifice in the

West after the time of Pope Gregory the Great (d. 604).” “There were current in the early days of Christianity other terms: ‘The Lord’s Supper’...etc.” The concept of the mass and the naming came long after the apostolic age.

“...the most important is that the Church intends the Mass to be regarded as a ‘true and proper sacrifice,’ and will not tolerate the idea that the sacrifice is identical with Holy Communion.”

“Scriptural Proof.—It is a notable fact that the Divine institution of the Mass can be established, one might almost say, with greater certainty by means of the Old Testament than by means of the New” (**Ibid**. P.8).

From the New York Catechism, “Jesus Christ gave us the sacrifice of the Mass to leave to His Church a visible sacrifice which continues His sacrifice on the cross until the end of time. The Mass is the same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross...”

The Creed of Pope Pius IV says, “I profess that in the Mass is offered to God a true, proper, and propitiatory sacrifice (that is, a sacrifice which satisfies the justice of God and so offsets the penalty for sin) for the living and the dead...”

The Council of Trent declared, “The sacrifice (in the Mass) is identical with the sacrifice of the Cross...”

From these quotes it seems obvious that the authorities in Catholicism see the mass as something more than a symbolic sacrifice. I suspect if you should poll the common folk, especially those without advanced education, they would think that in some mysterious, mystical way Jesus was being sacrificed when the priest performs his impressive ritual. Those who are well-educated and more enlightened can rationalize that it is just a symbolic act because reasons balks at the idea of it being “The same sacrifice as the sacrifice of the cross.”

* Note also this concession regarding the frequency of communion. “In the Apostolic age the first Christians assembled regularly on Sundays for ‘the breaking of bread’ (Acts XX:7): ‘on the first day of the week.’ ...Justin (Martyr) himself seems to be aware only of the Sunday celebration...” (**Catholic Encyclopedia**, Vol. 10, p20). Daily communion is an addition.

* You indicated that your church has borrowed much of its ritual from the Old Testament, but there is reason to conclude that a portion was also borrowed from the pagan religions of those early days. “Whether the priest’s vestments are historical developments from Judaism or paganism is a question still discussed by archaeologists” (**Ibid** Vol. 10, p. 20). Some other practices that seem to have pagan roots are the use of beads, nuns, monks and the nature and offices of the hierarchy. Those who are guided by the Word of Christ alone reject all of these things as additions of men.

I will later respond to your most recent letter after I have done some reading on the new subjects you have raised.

Best wishes for a good day. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGERS FIFTEENTH LETTER

Hi again: It is truly a small world! I heard Professor Shelly at that discussion group here in Rochester and since he is affiliated with Church of Christ, and said that he was from Nashville, I just took a shot in the dark that you might know him.

Now if you ever come to Detroit, you'll have to arrange for the three of us to meet. (Although I suppose that Michigan is not a Phoenix resident's choice for a vacation spot as we enter winter!)

* One point in your last email was about the successors to the Apostles. Yes indeed, Jesus established His Church on the Apostles. And you want proof that successors were elected to replace them. Well, if you limit yourself to the New

Testament only, I admit that there is no list of exactly who succeeded whom through even the early ages. But obviously the Apostles died, and yet the faith continued to spread, so there were successors, no?

* If you go outside the New Testament, then there is clearly historical documentation of at least some of the successors. For instance, Peter was martyred in Rome, and we know that St. Linus succeeded him. Also, you are familiar with Ignatius of Antioch, who was bishop in that city for 40 years until his death in 107! Weren't these men successors? They seem to have had authority, at least within their respective cities.

* You also claim that each pope is not a successor to Peter because that would require more thrones in heaven? Each pope is not an Apostle (capital A) but merely a successor to Peter and is responsible for handing down the faith. I don't see how the thrones in heaven cause a problem.

* As for the pharmacist analogy, I was trying to illustrate that the written word is indeed what we follow, but that is only *one* method of transmitting the doctor's orders. You are trying to say that the doctor's order contradicts the written word; this is utterly impossible (well, maybe for a real physician, but not in our analogy). You ask: if "the pope, the living voice of the church, and the traditions of Catholicism are equally sacred and authoritative with the Bible, could you not get along just as well without the Bible?" Well, no: the Bible *is* part of the tradition and voice of the church!

* I asked where in the Bible is listed the 27 books. You countered by asking where in the Bible it states that we should use robes, incense, sacraments, popes, relics, etc. This goes back to our fundamental issue: I never claimed that all things of the Catholic faith are found in the Bible. You *have* claimed that everything you believe is found in the Bible. So I cordially ask once again: Where is the list of books? Since there is none, then sola scriptura is logical impossibility -- not everything you believe comes from the Bible. Instead, you are trusting the early authority of *men*, those men who determined the 27 books of the NT. John, I really encourage you to pray about this; it is so essential to our differences on all these other issues!

* Paul said that his writings were the commands of God -- OK. But did all the other writers say that? And did any of them tell us to ignore the living teachers of the faith (no, according to 2 Thess. 2:15).

* To answer your question of me, some of our practices are drawn from the Jewish customs (robes, incense, singing the Psalms, etc.). Christianity is the fulfillment of Judaism, but that doesn't mean that everything had to be tossed out the window! Other practices such as the sacraments and the Mass are taken right from Jesus's own words and practices (he established baptism, confession, Eucharist, etc.) and they are fulfillments of Jewish practices (baptism comes from circumcision, Eucharist fulfills the sacrifice of the lamb, etc.) Some other things you mentioned have just evolved over the years (beads are nothing more than counting devices, and I can explain repetitive prayer in another email -- remember that *vain* repetition is condemned, not repetition itself).

* Another issue about the Bible: you have stated that "Jesus honored the canon of the Old Testament that was used by the Hebrews of his day." Yes, but did you realize that the OT the Jews used in his day consisted of 46 rather than 39 books? There were several canons floating around at the time, but they used the longer one. The Christian church maintained this until Martin Luther went back to a different canon, because he disagreed with several ideas, such as purgatory. (Of course, many Protestant Bibles include the 7 books under the title "Apocrypha," implying that it is not inspired.). So why do you use Luther's canon rather than that used by the Apostles?

* I mention this because your proof for purgatory comes from the second book of Maccabees (12:44-46) where it says that "it is a holy and pious thing to pray for the dead." Let's analyze this. Certainly you agree with the verse from Revelation that "nothing unclean shall enter Heaven" (21:27). Well if you deny purgatory, then you are saying that everyone who goes to Heaven must be perfectly clean at the moment of death. Even if my sins are forgiven, I know that I for one still fall short of the glory of God.

So if a Christian is perfect and ready for the glory of heaven, then there is no need for purgatory. Perhaps you have the mistaken notion that purgatory is a "second chance" for repentance or redemption. This is not what Catholics believe. We are saved by the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus, and have to receive that gift willingly. But even after

repenting from sin, we still suffer the effects of sin and need purification. My pastor once explained it this way: Repentance can be an instantaneous thing, but being transformed into a perfect Christian rarely is.

There are some Protestants who preach a "prosperity Gospel" which is understandable without a belief in purgatory or an understanding of redemptive suffering.

* Finally, Mary as the mother of God. You agree that she is the mother of Jesus. But you don't think this includes the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Yet Jesus said that "the Father and I are one" (John 10:30). This is the mystery of the trinity: you are saying that God is all three, and then splitting it down into three persons, as if they were sections of a pie. But we can't do that. This was all ironed out at the Council of Ephesus in 431 as a response to the Nestorian question. Nestorius said that Mary was the mother of Jesus as a person, but not Jesus as God. Well, that sounds to me like Jesus is two people! So if you agree that Jesus is both a human and divine person, then Mary has to be the mother of God. Obviously, this doesn't mean that Mary pre-dates God -- after all, she is a creature. I know it sounds confusing, but the "mother of God" title is not the confusing part, it's the nature of the Trinity that's confusing!

I wish you a blessed week, and look forward to your next email. This is a great discussion, and I pray for God's guidance in both of our hearts as we search for the truth. John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S FIFTEENTH REPLY

Dear John B: I hope all is well with you and your loved ones today. Our discussions are a good mental and spiritual exercise as we are forced to search the Scriptures (Acts 17:11), in order to give an answer for the reason of the hope that lies within us (I Pet. 3:15).

* As to successors of the Apostles of Christ. You concede that such cannot be proven, "if you limit yourself to the New Testament only." That illustrates a fundamental difference between us and the two faiths we represent. I am happy to rest my case on what the Bible says, being thoroughly convinced that in it God has provide me all things that pertain to life and godliness (II Pet. 1:3). To make your case you must go beyond the Bible. There is no question, when the apostles died that one or more men continued the work being done in Rome, Antioch, Alexandria or Ephesus, etc. The succession that occurred was of time and place, but not in office and authority. For example, Bill succeeded Tom as owner and resident of the house at 25 Michigan Ave. But Bill was a meter reader for the city and Tom was the Manager of the Water Board. The Christian faith continued to spread after the death of the Apostles just as it does today without their bodily presence. We are extending their work if we are faithful to the teaching/instruction they left for us to follow.

* You say the successors to Peter (popes) are responsible for handing down the faith. Can you name one essential element of Christianity that I cannot find in the New Testament of Christ? With that in hand, I do not need a man to hand the faith down to me. I only need to read, believe and obey God's Word. How do you explain the examples of corrupt and even wicked popes in the long lineage of your church? What happened to the faith when they were in power? Who kept it alive? How do you explain the hundreds of years when the popes sought to keep the Bible from the common people. In some cases it was considered a serious crime to be seriously punished if one was found with a Bible. Many Bibles were burned and their translators executed. Was this "handing down the faith?" (I cite this unpleasant case, not to be cruel or disrespectful to you, but to respond to your statement.)

* You ask where in the Bible is listed the 27 books? The New Testament is the 27 books inspired by the Holy Spirit. When I am speaking to an audience, I do not have to say, my foot, my hand, my eye, etc., etc. all believe this to be true. I simply say I believe this to be true. You must understand that when the various books were being written, each man was at his post of duty fighting the good fight of the faith. Yet in each case it was the Holy Spirit that was guiding them into all the truth (John 16:13). They may not even have been aware that each other was writing, or of what he was writing. Yet because of the common Author guiding each of them, each of them contributed one or more books that would be a harmonious part of the whole when their work was completed. I have before me The New American Bible, The New Catholic Translation. Its producers knew and recognized the same 27 books of the New Testament as do I.

* You concede that not "all things of the Catholic faith are found in the Bible." We both can agree that all things found in the 27 books of the New Testament are from God. All of those beliefs and practices that you hold that are not in the Bible are obviously things that men have added to the instructions left by Christ and his apostles. Three times in his Word God warns, "Add thou not to his word" (Prov. 30:6). You say that "Sola Scriptura" is a logical impossibility. Perhaps you should reflect on this assertion a while. God who is omniscient and omnipotent has provided his will to us in a written book, a permanent form that can be and has been translated into hundreds of different languages. He created us with minds capable of being educated and capable of understanding and obeying a written message. Just as we both can agree that there are 12 inches in a foot and 5,280 feet in a mile, we can both read and understand the Bible if we listen to it alone and not allow someone else confuse us with his human ideas. When the Hebrews writer says, "without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing to God" (11:6) we both can understand that! When Paul said, "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23) we have no problem understanding it. I challenge you to take a few days and just read your New Testament, without consulting any other author. Make notes on what God tells you to do or not to do, what to believe or to reject. You will be amazed at the wonderful power of the simple word of God. It is, the power of God unto salvation (Rom. 1:16).

* You acknowledge that Paul said his writings were the commands of God then ask did all the other writers say that? They did not have to repeat what Paul had already said. The same Holy Spirit guided them into all truth as He did Paul (John 16:13; II Pet. 1:21). Do you deny that Peter, James, John or Jude's word are authoritative as commands of the Lord? You then ask, "Did any of them tell us to ignore the living teachers of the faith?" You ask the wrong question, Better to ask, where do I find the inspired writers telling me to turn to "the living teachers of the faith." Rather than that he warns us to beware when they bring a teaching that is different than that given by them (inspired writers)? John warns us not to go beyond the teachings of (the doctrine) of Christ. Then he adds if any man goes beyond that teaching he has not God. He concludes by warning against giving aid and comfort to those who go beyond Christ's approved teaching (II John 9-11). Other writers give repeated warnings against hearing and following teachers with a message that is not Spirit given (Acts 20:28-31; I John 4:1).

* It is true that Christ was the fulfillment of the Law of Moses. But the actions of Christ and his apostles do not square with your conclusion that the church is authorized to borrow the rituals of the Old Law and incorporate them into Christian worship. When you read your New Testament, look closely to see if ever the Master or that first generation of disciples had clergy garments, honorific titles, rituals such as the Mass, statues, incense, etc.? If you can find it, I would appreciate being advised as to the location. The Mosaic Law with all its sacrifices and rituals was taken out of the way, nailed to the cross of Jesus (Col. 2:14-17). All of those material, sensory observances were but shadows of that reality that Christ brought.

* You say in passing that baptism comes from circumcision. As you read, you might find that for me in the Bible. Nowhere does God say that baptism comes from circumcision. Does your church baptize only males?

* As to the Canon of the Old Testament, first we are reminded that we have the Old Testament of the Hebrew manuscripts. This being the language in which it was originally written. We also have the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the O.T. produced in Egypt ca. 285-246 B.C. While the Greek translation did include the additional books that Jerome called "apocrypha," the Hebrew never did. Yes, the Hebrew teachers knew the 17 books of the Apocrypha, they sometimes read and used them, even as we do worthy books such as Josephus, or some great poet, but they always distinguished between them and scripture. It is true that Jesus and the apostles and many of the early Christians used the Septuagint in their teaching. But it is most significant that "no Book of the Apocrypha is quoted in the NT" (Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church, p. 68). Other Protestant leaders agreed with Luther that those books, were not of the same character and value as the 39 undisputed books of the Old Testament. Luther described them as 'useful and good to be read' and even included them as an appendix in the back of his translation of the Bible. The historical narratives of the apocryphal books are valuable for historical backgrounds of the inter-biblical period. I have several editions of these books and have read them and used them for reference in some of my classes.

* You perhaps inadvertently give the reason why the Church of Rome keeps these books in their Bible. "Your proof for purgatory comes from the second book of Maccabees." Are there other doctrines and practices that, lacking New Testament authority, are justified by an appeal to these books of doubtful origin?

* We do deny purgatory since it is nowhere mentioned in Scripture. The faithful Christian is kept clean by the atoning blood of Christ that "cleanseth (the Greek means keeps on cleansing) us from our sins. So long as we confess our sins, the grace of God keeps us ever ready to meet him in death (I John 1:9-10). You deny that purgatory offers a second chance to sinners. If the sinner is a member of the Catholic church at death, and unsuited for a home with God your doctrine provides him a second chance to have his sins purged so he can go to heaven. While millions no doubt have put their hope and trust in purgatory, they have no biblical authority for believing it, only the words of men. Suffering that is redemptive is born in this life. At death the righteous soul is carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom to a place of joyful rest (Luke 16:19-31). We reject the "prosperity gospel" that you mention.

* Regarding Mary as the mother of God. Your reasoning about this is faulty. Yes, Jesus shares the nature of Godhood with the Father and the Holy Spirit. Yes, Mary gave birth to the physical body of Christ. But eons before Mary was born the Word who later became flesh existed in the form of God (John 1:1-3; 14:26; Phil. 2:6). She was mother of the child born, but not of the Word of God that existed before her and through whom the human race (including Mary) was created (John 1:3). In no normal, reasonable sense of the word could it be said that Mary is the mother of God the Father or the Holy Spirit. Remember it was the Holy Spirit that cause her to conceive the Messiah (Luke 1:35). Your church does not believe that the Father, Son and Holy Spirit are one person. If that were so, when Christ died on Calvary, then truly God (all the sacred three) were dead. At his baptism the triune nature of God was evident: Jesus in the water, the Father speaking from heaven and the Holy Spirit descending upon him in the likeness of a dove (Matt. 3:16-17). When he was here on earth the divine Word was perfectly joined and melded into the son of Mary. There were not two separate beings as Nestorius taught. We know this, not because of the Council of Ephesus in 431, but because we find it taught in God's Word. The concept of the divine trinity I can deduce from the Scripture, but the concept of Mary as the mother of God is foreign to Scripture and totally unreasonable.

* Yes, God is capable of transcending time to make his body and blood available to all, but he did not choose to do that. Christ died on the cross, once for all (Heb. 9:26-28). Rather than a daily sacrifice by a priest, he left us a simple weekly memorial of bread and wine, to help us remember what he did for us (I Cor. 11: 23-25; Acts 20:7).

Have a good evening. Let us ever be growing in the grace and knowledge of the Lord Jesus (II Pet. 3:18).
John Waddey

P. S. Several years ago I edited a book entitled, **Introducing the Church of Christ**. Rubel Shelly contributed a chapter to it. If you would like to have a complementary copy, just provide me your mailing address in your next reply.

JOHN BELANGER'S SIXTEENTH LETTER

I am off on a week-long business trip tomorrow morning, but I wanted to get a response to you. I may not address all items from your last email, but I am not dodging anything; I can give a fuller response when I return.

* Allow me to start with the one major sticking point in our two views -- that of authority. I claim that Jesus established a Church, with men (Apostles) as the authoritative leaders. This authority was passed on in written and oral traditions (the written part being the New Testament). You claim that Jesus established a Church and chose men (Apostles) as the authoritative leaders. These men wrote the New Testament, which is now our authority, these men (and their offices) having died in the first century.

In all, our views are close, but that last statement about the Bible alone as the authority is still a problem. You ask if there are any essential elements of Christianity that cannot be found in the New Testament of Christ. For one, realize that nowhere in the Bible is the word "trinity" mentioned! The concept can be drawn from the Bible ("The Father and I are one"), but realize that there was much debate about even this concept in the early Church. Remember our last exchange about Nestorius claiming that Mary gave birth to Jesus as a human person, not divine. These things had to be fleshed out as they were not clearly spelled out in the NT, right? (Or perhaps you would not count that as an "essential element" of the faith?)

Also, the Bible does not overtly speak about other elements of faith, such as contraception and cloning. The concepts of the Bible can *help* us in the right direction on these issues only when understood in conjunction with the *living* authority. Did not the Apostle Peter say that the Scriptures are hard to understand correctly? (2 Peter 3:16)

* Sola scriptura is a logical impossibility. I am not simply trying to refute your statements -- I have indeed pondered this one myself. I see it as follows:

1. You claim the Bible as your only authority for all elements of faith.
2. The Bible does not say what books are to be included in it.
3. Then, to know which books belong in the canon, a non-Biblical source is needed for such a list.
4. Therefore, item 3 contradicts item 1.

You mistakenly use the analogy of identifying a hand or foot, but those items were given by God explicitly in our creation. On the contrary, God did not hand us a bound book with the canon already in it -- it had to be established by discerning His wishes under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. You also use the analogy of a mile being 5280 feet, and a foot being 12 inches. But again, you only know that because of a standard authority *outside* of the measurements themselves -- it was not decreed by God directly.

* Regarding the Catholic liturgy retaining elements of the Old Testament practices: Do you claim that the *entire* Mosaic Law was wiped out by the NT? If so, then folks such as John Shelby Spong are justified in saying that the prohibition on homosexual acts (from Leviticus) is no longer relevant. (Thankfully, we have Paul's prohibition in Romans, however.) So you should agree that *some* elements of the old are still acceptable. How to determine which ones? I suspect you might say only those mentioned again in the NT. Fair enough, but that leads us back to the sola scriptura discussion.

* Many of the vestments worn by a priest have their origins in the OT, as I mentioned in the earlier email. And yes, some (such as the "chasuble" and "stole") were garments worn by Roman citizens and gradually adopted -- and adapted -- for Christian liturgical use. Some things may even have derived from a pagan custom. But these were then adapted for use in the Christian liturgy.

For example, we don't know the date of Jesus' birth. Many experts say that Christmas in December is taken from the Roman pagan holiday. (Actually, others now disagree with that). Either way, I have no problem with December 25 -- in fact, it is good that we took such a pagan practice and Christianized it. Do you not celebrate Christmas, since the date is not given in the Bible?

* Finally, I mentioned that various sacraments are derived from the OT. I gave the case of baptism being the "fulfillment" of circumcision. You asked where that is in the Bible: it's from Colossians 2:11-12.

I will stop here. I didn't want to bite off more than I could chew, so let's save the other topics (purgatory, Mary, restricting access to the Bible, and the OT/Septuagint) for next time.

My address is below if you would like to send the book. I haven't written any books, but I'm sure there are many that explain the Catholic position better than this unworthy servant can. I'll be glad to send you one when the time is right. Have a great weekend! John Paul Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S SIXTEENTH REPLY

Dear John B: I hope you have a safe trip and that you family will be safe in your absence.

* You mention that the authority of the apostles "was passed on in written and oral traditions." We certainly can agree on the written record of their teaching. Can you tell me one oral tradition of Paul or the twelve that was passed on independently of the Written Record, i.e., our New Testament?

* It is true the twelve Apostles and Paul all died, but neither their offices nor their authority died with them. The church of Christ is still built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus being the chief cornerstone (Eph. 2:20). The words of Christ which they recorded for us will judge us in the last day (John 12:48; Luke 22:29-30).

* In reality, our different views of the sacred authority in Christianity are not close, rather they are miles apart. One the one hand we only do that which we find in the inspired Scripture while you roam far from that standard by your appeals to tradition and the living voice of the papacy. Only in a very few matters do we actually see eye to eye.

* Should a person living in China, India or the hinterlands of Africa, who knows nothing of Christianity, find a New Testament in his language, could he read it and believing its message, come to faith in Jesus as God's Son. Could he by following the teaching set forth therein be saved and serve God as a Christian? We say yes. What do you say?

* It is true that the word "trinity" is not found in the pages of the New Testament, but the concept of one God manifested in three persons is scattered throughout that Book. I frequently explain the doctrine of the trinity in my classes and sermons, but never by appealing to the various councils convened since the death of the Apostles. Matthew's account of the baptism of Jesus demonstrates the triune nature of God (Matt. 3:16-17). Likewise his account of the Great Commission with its instruction to baptize disciples into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit (Matt. 28:20). Other verses also convey this truth. Time and again the Scriptures declare that our God is one (Eph. 4:4-5). Remember the ruling of the council did not resolve this question completely for there were and still are some who challenge its findings.

* The inspired writers give us all the needed and necessary information about the birth of Jesus. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit while Mary was yet a virgin who had never known a man (Luke 1:27-35). The child conceived was "the Son of God." That settles the matter as to the nature of Jesus. He was as human as Mary and as divine as his heavenly Father.

* We do agree that wise and godly men who are knowledgeable in God's Word can help us in our endeavor to understand the Scripture. We view all such men as uninspired teachers, just as I myself. Their ideas must square with the Word of God. You believe that some contemporary men (popes) can actually speak for God and that all should accept their pronouncements, even if they do not necessarily agree with the Scriptures.

* Peter told us what every seriously student of Scripture knows by experience, that some Scripture is hard to be understood (II Pet. 3:16). The Catholic church, having in their pope a "living voice" to interpret Scripture for them, has not resolved the problem for Catholics. Have there not been a perpetual series of conflicting views about numerous moral/spiritual matters in that church?

* I have no doubts as to the authenticity and authority of my New Testament with its 27 inspired books. But even with your "living voice," you seem to be unsure of the authenticity and the authority of those books. You need an additional, external voice to tell you what you should do. The books written by the Apostles, Mark, Luke, Paul and Jude were recognized as authoritative by those who received them. They were circulated among the churches and cherished as from God. In his wisdom, Christ chose to reveal his Will in this step by step method. Confusion arose when books, written by uninspired authors began to be circulated and some treated them as Scripture. Impostors and false-teachers forged the names of apostles and other people associated with Christ to books they had written. Long before a council was convened to issue an official lists of canonical books, the churches used common sense standards to discriminate between the true and false documents. Some were declared to be unworthy because they contained teachings contrary to that of

the apostles. Others were recognized as authentic and authoritative because of their authors, Peter, Paul, etc. A third group were judged to be true and helpful but not inspired and therefore not treated as Scripture. Such were the Epistle of Barnabas, the epistles of men like Polycarp and Ignatius, etc.

* As to the canon, if the Roman Catholic Church had never existed, we would still have the writings of God's chosen men. We could read them, believe and obey them and be pleasing to God.

* You might want to let your words rest a few days and then go back and reread them. They seem to be saying that you do not put much faith or confidence in the Bible, but you put ultimate trust in the head of your church. Rather than set forth a dozen reasons not to accept the Scripture as God's standard for his people, we should be like the author of the 119th Psalm. He wrote, "Oh how love I thy law! It is my meditation all the day" (119:97).

* We do not say the "entire Mosaic Law was wiped out by the New Testament." Rather we hear and respect what the inspired writers of the New Testament say about the Old Covenant. Jesus came not to destroy it, but to fulfill it (Matt. 5:17). He "took it out of the way, nailing it to the cross" (Col. 2:14). In the place of the Old, Jesus gave us "a better covenant, which hath been enacted upon better promises" (Heb. 8:6). He made for us a "new covenant...Not according to the covenant that (God) made with their fathers in the day that (He) took them by the hand to lead them forth out of the land of Egypt" (Heb. 8:8-9). "In that he saith, a new covenant, he hath made the first told. But that which is becoming old and waxeth aged is nigh unto vanishing away" (Heb. 8:13). "For whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom. 15:4). "Now these things happened unto them (Old Testament people) by way of example and they were written for our admonition, upon whom the end of the ages are come" (I Cor. 10:11). We accept the Old Testament, in every respect, as true and fully God's Word. But it has now been superseded by the New Testament of Christ. We love the Old, read it, believe it and profit greatly from it. (Currently I am teaching classes in the historical books of I and II Samuel and in Nehemiah. I also am teaching a class in Revelation in addition to my two weekly sermons). It answers questions such as the origin of the creation? The origin of man, marriage, the family, sin, worship, etc. But if I wish to know how to be saved, I must look to Christ and his Will. So also with how to worship acceptably today? I have no hesitation to turn to Lev. 18:22 to show how God views same sex relations as abomination. I also use Paul's condemnation in Romans 1:26-27.

* As to your practice of reaching back to the Old Testament and to the pagan customs of Rome to find certain practices for your liturgy, I much prefer to look to Christ. The writer of Hebrews tells us that the law was a shadow of the good things to come" (Heb. 10:1). Now that Christ has come and given us his new and living way, we no longer want or need to cling to the shadows of the old system.

* As to the gorgeous vestments of the priests, they were unknown in the early days of the faith. Neither Christ nor the apostles nor the first generation of Christians were so adorned. The adornment that pleases God is "the hidden man of the heart, in the incorruptible apparel of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price" (I Pet. 3:3-4). The saved are adorned in "the righteous acts of the saints" (Rev. 19:8). Even the most humble Christians have washed his robes and "made them white in the blood of the Lamb" (Rev. 7:14). While the vestments are indeed beautiful and impressive, we must recognize that they are only impressive to men, not to God.

* You are correct in noting that the celebration of the Christmas holy day is borrowed from the ancient pagan Saturnalia and Brumalia. Your celebration is a synthesis of Pagan and Christian rites. While I enjoy the holiday and the festivities of the season, I do not celebrate Christmas as a Holy Day unto God. I am grateful every day of the year for the birth of the Savior and each Lord's Day I worship and remember his death and resurrection (I Cor. 11:23-26). Perhaps you know that the Easter Celebration is of the same nature as are some of the other holy days of your faith.

* I look forward to discussing other matters with you. It is good for me to probe these things with you and to look to God's Word for the confirmation of my faith.

Have a great weekend.

Your friendly pen pal, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S SEVENTEENTH LETTER

Hello again, pen pal! I hope all is well with you and yours. I am back from my business trip and am eager to continue our discussion...

* First, in our previous email I mentioned that we were close on many topics. I was trying to look for the positive in things. Yes, the areas that we disagree on are indeed major. While you have never said this, some Protestants do not consider Catholics to be Christians. Frankly, that is offensive to me. Anyone who is baptized and proclaims Jesus as Lord and Savior is a Christian.

* You had asked if someone "living in China, India or the hinterlands of Africa, who knows nothing of Christianity, finds a New Testament in his language, could he read it and believing its message come to faith in Jesus as God's Son. Could he by following the teaching set forth therein be saved and serve God as a Christian?" I would indeed say yes! I don't know why this is even an issue. While I believe that the Catholic Church is the fullest form of Christianity, it is certainly possible to be saved even without exposure to the New Testament (God judges men by what is in their heart, not by what they cannot know). But as Catholics, we are not minimalists, only seeking the bare essentials to serve God! We are open to his written word and its interpretation by the living authority that was established by Christ.

* Your teaching on the Trinity is for the most part correct (you quoted Matthew 3:16 to show that Jesus is the Son, and also Ephesians 4:4-6 to underscore that God is one). I say this in all charity, but it's too bad that you don't reference the early Councils, because the question of Mary as the Mother of God was settled by the early Christians, and Protestants who ignore the first 1500 years of Christianity are now re-inventing the wheel when that question is posed. Yes, there were some that did not (and do not still) agree with the Councils, but there were also many that did not agree with Jesus, and walked away (John 6:66). These dissenters have no bearing on what truth is! By offering sympathy to the dissenters, one can weave a path through all sorts of Christian fringe sects to suit any current belief. Better to stick with the visible Church.

* But let's examine the Mary question further: You say that she is the mother of Jesus. And Jesus is God. But she is not the mother of God. Isn't this an illogical sequence? Your rationale is that she could not be the mother of God the Father, since she is a creature of Him. And I agree with that -- so there is indeed something puzzling here. But to deny that she is the Mother of God is to divorce the very essence of Jesus: he is both human and divine, and this cannot be divided. Early Christian theologians called this the "hypostatic union." So it is better to say that she is the Mother of God, as Elizabeth did in Luke 1:43. Also see verse 35, where Gabriel clearly states that her son will be the Son of God, thus she must be the mother of God, no?

* If you still cannot bring yourself to call her the mother of God, wouldn't you be OK with the term "blessed mother"? While that may have a Catholic "ring" to it, she is certainly the mother of Jesus, and the Bible clearly teaches that all generations shall call her blessed (Luke 1:48).

* Per your suggestion, I have had a few days to reread my thoughts on the Bible as authority. After doing so, I cannot help but think that you have misunderstood me. It is not "either/or" when it comes to the Bible and the living Church. That is a false dichotomy. I believe that the Bible is the inerrant Word of God -- as do you -- but to interpret this Word in a vacuum is dangerous. Have I really "set forth a dozen reasons not to accept the Scripture as God's standard for his people"? I would say that Scripture is the standard, but it cannot always be taken in a literalistic fashion.

I think that many of the areas we disagree on are at least mentioned in the Bible, and my explanations have never contradicted the correct interpretation of the Bible. This makes me think back to an earlier email where you stated that "God's word does not contradict itself." Of course this is true, but there are many *apparent* contradictions:

--John 6:52-53; Jesus says that his flesh is real food. Compare with John 6:63; the flesh profits nothing.

--Matthew 10:34-35; Jesus came not to bring peace, but division (mother against daughter, etc.). Compare with Isaiah 9:5 (the "Prince of Peace") and Ephesians 6:15 (the gospel of Peace).

--There is only one mediator (1 Tim 2:5); compare with intercessory prayer mentioned in Romans 15:30 and 2 Thess. 3:1.

--Call no man father (Matt. 23:9). Compare with Acts 7:2, where the Jewish leaders are called fathers, and also Romans 4:16-17, where we hear that "Abraham is the father of us all".

We have discussed these contradictions, so I will not elaborate on them. But I hope you will see that we cannot cling to a single verse in order to prove a point. We must understand things in harmony with the full Bible, and with at least some deference to the ways that the early Christians taught them. Thus, tradition is not contradictory, but rather it is that lens which helps us focus the Bible.

* I am glad that you think a priest's robes are gorgeous : but they are actually less expensive than the suits I often see Protestant preachers wearing, with their cuff links and silk ties. Try to see these things in a better light: Catholics realize that worship of God sets us apart from the world, and the robes used in the liturgy are meant to make the priest stand out from secular garb.

* I have a question based on your earlier mention of the 12 thrones for the Apostles (from Matt. 19:28). How many Apostles do you say there were? The NT names 15: the original 12 plus Matthias, Paul, and Barnabas. You used this verse to support the view that the Apostles had no successors, but how would you apply the thrones interpretation to 15?

* Finally, may I renew a topic that we discussed earlier? Contraception is not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, so we cannot use that as our only basis. But we can look at related verses, along with the history of Christian teaching on this topic. I had said a while back that all Protestants condemned contraception until 1930. That's when the postmodern view of relativism took hold, and now Catholics are the only Christians who formally teach that it is immoral. But we can use the Bible along with science and reason to analyze it. First, you agree that homosexuality is immoral, because the Bible says it is. But why is it wrong, other than the fact that the Bible says so? Because God made sex for procreation, and the loving intimacy of a man and woman makes this possible (if He made the procreating act onerous, how long would humanity have survived?). A homosexual relationship means that the fruit of the act is rendered biologically impossible, thus violating God's design. Well, a contraceptive relationship even within marriage is doing the same thing -- the couple wants to enjoy the pleasure of sex, but is making the potential fruit of this act impossible. So this is a case where the Church has applied the Bible's teaching on sex (including Genesis 38:9-10 and Romans 1:24-26, among others) to all relationships. This is unquestionably the historical teaching of all Christians, until the 1930 Lambeth Conference. Now, would you say that the Catholic Church's view on contraception is unbiblical?

I did receive your book last week and I thank you! I will try to read it in the next couple of weeks. I await your reply on my comments above, along with others if you wish to direct our conversation to other topics also.

Peace, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY SEVENTEENTH REPLY

Dear Friend John B: I am glad you had a safe and prosperous trip and found all well when you returned home. I too eagerly await your replies to my letters.

* We both believe in contraception. Some Catholics attempt to limit the number of their children by the "natural family planning" method of contraception. Sometimes this works, sometimes it does not. Since God did not see fit to forbid this when he communicated his will to man in his Sacred Book, we judge it to be presumptuous for someone to tell couples that such is sinful and forbidden. I offer the following reasons to limit the size of one's family. 1. The ability to provide adequately for the number of children we beget.. Too many children in a family living on a limited income will bring hardships on the entire family. Better to have only so many children as we can adequately support. 2. The physical and mental health of the mother. Too many babies, too close together, can be debilitating to the mother's body. The amount of work to care for her home and several children can be overwhelming. Sometimes the stress of too many children can cause emotional stress and harm. 3. I have no right to produce offspring I cannot provide for and then expect others to "pick up the tab" for them. From the outside it appears that "no artificial contraception" is a doctrine loved and promoted by the unmarried clergy with a comfortable living, but ignored by large numbers of young Catholic families

in the Western world. It seems that it is primarily in the third world nations is this belief commonly honored.

* The Pharisees of Jesus's day had their special clergy garments. "They make broad their phylacteries, and enlarge the borders of their garments." But Jesus said, "all their works they do to be seen of men" (Matt. 23:5). That I or any human might think a garment is gorgeous does not therefore mean that God approves of his leaders wearing such for worship. Neither Jesus nor his apostles were adorned in "clergy cloth." Since we are instructed to follow his example (I Pet. 2:21), neither should today's leaders do so. You can only appeal to the Mosaic code or to the priests of pagan Rome to justify such a practice.

* If I may say so, your affirmation of your faith in an inerrant Bible seems weak. You believe that "but" you also believe that the living voice of your church can say and do things differently than set forth in Scripture. Would it not be better to say that you believe in an inerrant Bible but accept it only when it agrees with the living voice of your church? I do not interpret the Bible in a vacuum. First I seek to understand each verse within the context of the book in which it is written. I interpret that particular book in its relation to the entire 66 books of the Bible and especially to Christ's teaching. I always consider such questions as who was writing?, to whom he wrote?, when he wrote?, the situation or environment out of which the book was written? I look for the purposes of the book as indicated by the author. I take time to consider the cultural context of the day and age when the book was written. I compare various translations and consult dictionaries as to the proper meaning of the words used. Occasionally I check to see what other men, wise in Scripture have said concerning the passage. Those comments might come from men of different denominations including Catholics. Forty years ago I worked with a fellow named Joe ???, an Italian Catholic. He chided me for reading the Bible or religious literature while on my lunch hour and breaks. I remember him saying, "Me, I just pay the priest and let him tell me what to believe."

* You are correct in referring to the difficulties in the Bible as "apparent" contradictions. John W. Haley wrote an excellent book entitled, *Alleged Discrepancies of the Bible*. George DeHoff produced a similar volume called, *Alleged Contradictions of the Bible*. Every case presented by those who search for such things is easily explainable in a reasonable way.

* No objections could be raised by referring to Mary as the blessed mother of Jesus. But to call her the mother of God is confusing and misleading. I suspect that when this doctrine evolved, theologians were giving to Mary the kind of recognition and honor enjoyed by female goddesses in pagan religions. Most pagan religions have a female deity to complement the dominate male god. Such is not the case either in Judaism or Christianity. Mary was chosen to be the earthly vessel through whom Messiah would come into the world. She was his mother. The word "God" is a term that speaks of the nature of the sacred Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Sometime it is used as a name for the Father. Because of that usage, to speak of Mary as the Mother of God, leads the unsuspecting to conclude that she is the mother of the Father as well as the Son. Such is not the case. The adoration given to Mary by those who are humble and not well educated reveals the fact I am making. I think it is fair to say that many of the Hispanics from Mexico and nations south, revere Mary even above Jesus. We make it our goal to call Bible things by Bible words. This eliminates much confusion created by theologians.

* You say that my statements about the "Trinity" are mostly correct. Now, I cited Scripture to show that Father, Son and Holy Spirit are all deity and one in their thinking, plans and actions. Do you find fault in defining what God reveals about himself in Scripture? This is what early Christians believed before Arians and other heretics began to promote their peculiar views. It was what they believed and taught long before the councils issued their edicts. As it turns out most of the Councils and the later creeds of both Catholic and the major Protestant churches are in agreement with what God himself says of himself.

* You say, "The dissenters have no bearing on what truth is." Truth is what God declares on any subject. It is absolute, and has precedence over anything a church (including the Roman Catholic Church), a theologian or a dissenting group may say or think. It is the divine standard by which each man's or church's teaching must be measured. Those that are found to comply with the divine standard (the Bible) are correct on that point. Those that are found to be at odds with scripture are mistaken on that point. The words of Christ will judge us in the last day (John 12:48).

* I take it that you agree that if a man living in some remote corner of the world should find a Bible he could read and

if he came to faith in Christ as the Son of God and resolved to obey him and did so, he could be saved. Now if he could be saved and pleasing to God without ever hearing of the Roman Catholic Church and her particular doctrine, could not all men every where do the same? People did so before there was ever a church in Rome (Acts 2:1-47).

* You say "it is certainly possible to be saved even without exposure to the New Testament! (God judges men by what is in their heart, not by what they cannot know)." Yet Paul tells us "the gospel is the power of God unto salvation" (Rom. 1:16). Without exposure in some way to the teaching of Christ one could not even know about Jesus or salvation. Christ himself said, "except ye believe that I am he, ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). Again the writer of Hebrews says that "Without faith it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto God: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is..." (Heb. 11:6). But Paul affirms that "belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ" (Rom. 10:17). If the primitive man could be saved without some knowledge of God's Word, he could be saved without Christ who is revealed in the Word. If he could be saved in that situation, then there would be no need of sending a missionary to preach the gospel to him (Mark 16:15-16). It is my belief that only those who believe in Christ Jesus and obey his Will shall be saved. He is the author of eternal salvation to all them that obey him" (Heb. 5:9). Our challenge is to search the scriptures daily to determine that will and them in faith to conform to it (Acts 17:11). That is my goal and I am confident it is yours as well.

Have a good evening. God be with you. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S EIGHTEENTH LETTER

Hi John: I have a busy couple of days ahead so I'll respond now. Don't feel obligated to reply right away; I know you're a busy guy. I'm glad you take the time to explain so carefully your views on these things. If I may speak for both of us -- we are learning much through this exchange. I for one am learning to find my Bible verses better, something that Catholics are not always good at!

* When I speak against contraception, I am speaking of artificial contraception. Believe it or not, the Catholic Church also recognizes those same reasons why it might be prudent to postpone (even indefinitely) a pregnancy -- such as finances, mother's health, etc. That is up to the couple to pray about and decide. But my point focuses on the method we use to carry out this decision. God's plan for sex is to (potentially) lead to new life. To purposely place an unnatural barrier in that act is contrary to God's will (I can show you this from Scripture in just a moment). Now, you mention natural family planning, which is the only moral way to avoid pregnancy. Why? Because we are not divorcing "love" from "life." Instead, a couple chooses to postpone the entire act until the woman's body is known to be not ready or able to conceive. No method is 100%, but you should realize that natural family planning is 98% when practiced correctly, as compared to 90% or less for condoms. Of course, surgical sterilization is 99%, but that is mutilation of the body for unnecessary reasons.

Now do you see the difference? -- it's not the intention, but the action taken. An analogy I've used before relates to eating, another bodily function created by God for pleasure and necessity: If you choose to fast, you should avoid food altogether, right? You wouldn't eat and then throw it up -- engaging in the act but repudiating the natural result. But this is identical to artificial contraception: you engage in the act, but repudiate the natural (potential) result. Better to abstain from food (fasting) or from sex (natural family planning).

If you choose to go by Biblical dictates only, let's examine the case of Onan in Genesis 38. This man was commanded to have relations with his brother's widow, according to the Levirate law. But he "wasted his seed upon the ground." God was "greatly offended" by this, and struck Onan down. Now, you might say that he was killed simply because he disobeyed the law, not for the seed-spilling itself. But in Deuteronomy 25:5-10, we see that the penalty for violating this Levirate law is not death, but public humiliation. What conclusions do you draw about "spilling the seed," then?

This is a perfectly acceptable interpretation of the Bible. But also remember the reason I gave in my previous email about homosexuality and artificial contraception being nearly the same. In both cases, God's design is being circumvented. I also must presume that you believe all of Christianity to have been wrong about this point until 1930.

* Regarding the clothing worn by Jesus -- you interpret our following his example quite strictly, down to personal clothing and appearance. Must we then have all men wear beards and sandals today? I do not mean to be sarcastic. How do you decide what physical accouterments comply with his example and which do not?

* Even though you deny it, I would still say that you are interpreting the Bible in a vacuum. You should indeed study the context of that book, its literary style, the author and the audience, the culture of the time, etc. You can read other commentaries, including Protestant and Catholic, and decide what the best interpretation is. While I guess it's not a total vacuum, *you* are still the judge as to what theological point suits that passage. In a sense, you are your own body of Christ. It would be better to think with the mind of the Church, the visible body of Christ. Remember, Martin Luther was devastated when other splinter groups split from him, but there was nothing he could say, since he himself had separated from the Church by his own authority. (As before, I acknowledge that he did have many valid complaints, but his actions were drastic and harmful to Jesus's wish that we all be one.)

* I will officially apologize for Joe the Italian. His views were quite wrong and they are not -- nor ever were -- the teachings of the Catholic Church.

* I'm glad we agree on the "apparent contradictions in Scripture" discussion. Yes, even these can be harmonized if we interpret them correctly.

* When I said that your view of the Trinity was almost correct, here is what I meant: your actual explanation of the Trinity is accurate -- there is one God, but in three persons; the three are intimately one. But when you deny that Mary is the mother of God, you are going back on that explanation to drive a wedge into that very oneness. You say that "the word 'God' is a term that speaks of the nature of the sacred Three, Father, Son and Holy Spirit." Yes, but each of *those* three are *also* God in the fullest sense too! Deny Mary as mother of God is to deny that sentence. You mention Arianism, but that is exactly what you are leading towards by thinking that Jesus's humanity is not related to his divinity.

* Regarding the person in a remote part of the world that finds the Bible: Yes, as I said before, he can be saved. You extend that to say that this is all any of us need, then. But re-read my previous answer: we should not be minimalists! If a man loves his wife, does he do the bare minimum to hold the marriage together? No! He can do so, but he should seek to please her in every way and give glory to God. To say that we only need to do *only* those things mentioned in the Bible is a form of this minimalism.

* You quote St. Paul: "belief cometh of hearing, and hearing by the word of Christ." Yes, which is of course why we need missionaries. When I say the man in a remote location can be saved without seeing a Bible, it is still by Christ Jesus. That doesn't mean we shouldn't share the good news with him! May I ask what your view is of those millions of people who lived after Christ but were not privileged to hear His Gospel? Can't God save them in his own mysterious way?

* I agree with your last statement. In my last email I defined a Christian as a baptized person who accepts Jesus as a personal Savior, but I did not mean that to be the same as a saved person. So I like your definition as far as the "saving" part.

* I guess I might as well throw out a related topic. What is your view of the statement "once saved, always saved"? You must realize that Catholics are often asked "Are you saved?" and here's my response to that: I have been saved, I am being saved, and I hope to be saved. Jesus saved us all by His passion, death, and resurrection (see Ephesians 2:7-8 and Romans 8:24). But Paul tells us to "work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Phil. 2:12). Every day I try to work out my salvation by doing God's will and getting closer to the goal, which is heaven. That is when I will be saved in the true sense.

Some Protestants teach that you can be saved, and then go rob a bank but still be assured of salvation. Of course that doesn't make sense, so they reason that the person was never really saved. So that means that we're back to square one: a person cannot *know* if he is saved! Would you agree with all or most of my views on this?

* I am just starting the book you sent, and I found it interesting to read the two newsletters from your church that you

sent. Thank you for defending the Pope on his comments about Islam. I know you have many beefs with him about theological issues, but it is good that you regard him as a Christian leader, although not a leader in the sense that I might view him. But anyway, thank you. He is a good and holy man, and I ask you to pray for him -- he too struggles every day to discern God's will and he is right to speak up about the danger of Islam.

Despite our numerous differences in this ongoing discussion, I can tell from your column in the newsletter that you and I agree on many, many things! (President Bush, Islam, decaying morality, etc.)

* Remember, your views about Catholics are influenced by what you see Catholics do and say -- such as Joe the Italian or the two senators from Massachusetts (I cannot judge their souls, but I suggest that Messrs. Kennedy and Kerry read Paul's advice about working out their salvation with fear and trembling). While I cannot change your mind on these many topics we ponder, I do hope that I have given a clearer view on what the Catholic Church *really* teaches, despite the harm that tepid Catholics create.

Well, I've rambled again. I send you my best wishes for the remainder of your week. John Paul Belanger

JOHN WADDEY EIGHTEENTH REPLY

Dear John B: Thank you for your speedy reply. Your good spirit is commendable. I too profit from our exchanges and could wish that others were willing to set forth their beliefs and compare them with God's Word in a friendly, peaceful atmosphere. Solomon wisely observed, 'Iron sharpeneth iron; So a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend' (Prov. 27:17). By rubbing our opposing thoughts and convictions together both of us should be sharper in our thinking. Peter exhorts us to be ready always to an answer to every man that asketh you a reason concerning the hope that is in you..." (I Pet. 3:15).

* We can certainly agree on the lack of Christian principles reflected in the lives of people like Ted Kennedy, John Kerry, etc. My views of politics and social/moral issues is shaped by my Christian values and perspective. I support President Bush, not because I am a Republican, but because his publicly expressed values and his conduct I find to be far superior to those of his harsh critics.

* The concept that once a person is saved he cannot be lost is unreasonable on the face of it and it is clearly contrary to the Scripture. We have numerous Biblical examples of people who fell away from God. Adam and Judas for example. Paul warned the Galatians, "Ye are severed from Christ, ye who would be justified by the law; ye are fallen away from grace" (Gal. 5:4). He warned the Corinthians, "let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (I Cor. 10:12). To Timothy he wrote of Hymenaeus and Alexander, Christians who thrust faith from themselves and made shipwreck concerning the faith. He had delivered them unto Satan (I Tim. 1:19-20). Other verses could be cited but these make the case.

* We are saved by grace through faith, and that not of ourselves (Eph. 2:8-9). It is important however to note that when biblical writers speak of saving faith, they always have in mind obedient faith. Thus Paul writes of the obedience of faith when he preached (Rom. 1:5; 16:26). He also wrote that while race is no longer important it is "faith working through love that saves (Gal. 5:6). Although we can in no way earn or merit our salvation, Christ does expect us to be obedient to his will (Matt. 28:20). We are expected to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ (II Pet. 3:18). In this sense we work out our own salvation in fear and trembling (Phil.2:12).

* Your definition of "Christian" is a bit confusing. Biblically speaking, a Christian is a disciple or follower of Christ (Acts 11:26). To be a disciple means that we have taken up our cross and are following Jesus to the best of our ability (Matt. 16:24). Jesus made it clear to Nicodemus that only those who are born of water and the Spirit can enter his kingdom and thus be one of his disciples (John 3:5). That new birth is experienced when a believer repents and is baptized in name of Jesus, for the remission of his sins and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Note there is the water of baptism and the gift of the Holy Spirit which is the seal of our salvation (Eph. 1:13-14). However in our

everyday conversation we add some additional meanings to the term Christian. We often use it as an adjective to describe a certain genera of literature and music, book stores that sell Christian literature, schools that are operated by Christians, etc. It is used to describe behavior that conforms to the standards of Christ. We use it broadly to refer to or describe any of the various religious bodies that profess faith in Christ. But in so doing it does not mean that we accept their peculiar beliefs or endorse their activities or even their existence.

* As to the possibility of salvation for the man who knows not Christ, I think I have read that since Vatican II the official position of your church is that men of good will can be saved who are striving to do the best they can, even in other "non-Christian" religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism etc? Is this correct? This had resulted in dialog between representatives of the Catholic church and these various world religions. God says without faith (in Him) it is impossible to be well-pleasing unto Him (Heb. 11:6). Jesus said, "except ye believe that I am he (Messiah) ye shall die in your sins" (John 8:24). When a person or a church says differently, I must reject them and stick with the divine declaration.

* If man cannot understand his bible without the guidance of the Roman Catholic church, how did the early Christians serve God prior to the emergence of the papacy in Rome and before the bishops of Rome could assert that they were the head of the church? It was some 500 years before that occurred. If I cannot understand the Bible without an official representative of the Catholic Church, then I as an individual and layman do not need a Bible, I just need a priest. That philosophy was dominate in the Catholic church prior to Vatican II. I can remember reading about people in Italy standing in long lines to purchase Bibles, openly from venders, from that notable change in church thinking. Prior to that Bibles in the common language were scarce in Italy and parishioners were never encouraged to read them.

* If for the sake of truth and clarity Catholics said Mary is the Mother of Jesus, who shares godhood with his Father in Heaven, there would be no confusion or dispute. The normal Catholic usage leaves the impression that the clergy want folks to believe that Mary is the mother of God (all inclusive), but when a thinking person challenges the unreasonableness of this assertion, they can always fall back on the excuse, "you misunderstand, we just mean the mother of Jesus who was divine. Mary did not give birth to the divinity of Jesus. He existed from the beginning with the Father (John 1:1-3). He existed before there was a cosmos, and before there was a human race. He created Adam and Eve several thousand years before Mary was born. When the divine Word determined to come down and live among us, he chose to be born as a man. Mary was his chosen vessel (Luke 1:31-35). The Holy Spirit caused her to conceive while yet a virgin and in a way beyond our knowledge and comprehension, the Word was perfectly blended with her child so that Jesus was truly the Son of Man and the Son of God. Mary played a small part in the totality of the life of the Word of God. He existed from eternity before Mary and after her short earthly life, he continues to exist and will in all eternity. We are happy to accept and believe what the Bible reveals, avoiding vain speculation about them. Such things as her immaculate conception and bodily assumption are holy legends, not founded on God's truth.

* You object that I am the judge of what I believe. Ponder this question, "Why did God give you intelligence? Why did he make you in His own image and endow you with volition, able to choose between good and evil and truth and error?" He gave you a Bible and expects you to read it believe it and follow its instructions. You will be judged by it (John 12:48; Rev. 20:11-12). I do not study the Word in a vacuum, nor do I live in a nursery, needing a superior to tell me what I should or should not believe.

* You make more of my comparison of your clergy vestments and the dress of Jesus and the apostles than do I. My comparison was between ordinary dress and that which sets one apart and elevates him in the eyes of the worshipers. We need not wear robes nor sandals to be like Christ. If however I stood up with an assault rifle in my hand terrorizing the hearers, like some Islamic Jihadists, I would clearly be unlike the Prince of Peace. So is the idea of gorgeous robes for ministers.

* I marvel at the exalted place contraception has in the hierarchy of Catholic thinking.. While there seem to be little concern about teaching and practicing things in their faith that are out of harmony with Scripture, there is endless concern about whether couples use the Catholic brand of contraception or the other brand called artificial. It is true that God tells us to be fruitful and multiply. It is also true that most Catholic couples join with Protestant couples in limiting the number of their offspring. We agree that abortion is wrong, but contraception does not cause an abortion, it prevents conception

from occurring. We both agree there are legitimate reasons for devout couples to limit the number of their children. We agree that no one should be forced to use a method of contraception that he/she feels is wrong...or to use it at all. While it is true that no one used mass produced condoms as a method of birth prior to 75 or 80 years ago, people did find ways to limit conception. One of your popes created a law and issued an edict that one could not be a faithful Catholic and use such preventive measures. But God did not do so. That law is of the same genera as celibacy. The likelihood is that it too will one day be struck down as unenforceable. The case of Onan in Genesis 38:9 is not helpful, since it is dealing with a different subject. Onan refused to rear up seed (offspring) to bear his brother's name and inherit his possessions. For that God punished him. This is clearly stated as the reason why God smote him. I once hear a Black preacher say, " The Bible says it, I believe it, That settles it!"

One last thing. There are some basic tools that are most helpful in Bible study. You should have a concordance to help you locate particular scriptures, a good quality Bible Dictionary which provides valuable information on persons, places and things in Scripture and a good Dictionary of Biblical words such as **W. E. Vines Expository Dictionary of Bible Words**.

I remain your friend in hope of heaven, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S NINETEENTH LETTER

Good evening John: It's been quite a busy week, but now I look forward to getting back to our email discussion. I always like to point out the areas that we do agree on, and I think we are pretty close on several items in the last exchange. First, the concept of "once saved, always saved." I had posed that question to you since I sometimes hear that from various Protestant groups, and I was curious how you see that. Now I see that we agree.

* I also think we agree on the concept of obedient faith -- true faith will naturally bear fruit in the works of a good Christian. The Catholic Church teaches that we are saved by grace through Jesus's passion, death, and resurrection. No man can do anything to "earn" salvation. And this has been the constant teaching of the Church. Now, I suspect you may bring up indulgences, because some folks who don't have a clear understanding of them think it is the Catholic way of "earning" a ticket to heaven. Not at all -- one is saved by faith in Jesus. The concept of indulgences is related to purgatory, the "perfecting" of a *saved* person before entering the banquet of heaven (Revelation 21:27, also 2 Maccabees 12, which I realize you would reject as non-canonical). We can discuss purgatory as a separate item, but my point is that indulgences do not detract from the statement that we are granted eternal salvation solely because Jesus died for us and we then believe in Him.

It is sorrowful that much of the debate since the 16th century between Catholics and Protestants has centered on faith vs. works. It is both! Sola fide in the strictest sense is not scriptural ("Faith without works is dead," James 2:26) but if we say that sola fide includes the "works" idea, then I would accept it. However, Martin Luther was quite strict about this and even proposed dropping the book of James because of the various mentions of works ("A man is justified by works, not by faith alone," James 2:24). Now I know there are many Catholics who think the opposite -- as long as they contribute to the parish and mumble a few prayers each day, they can get to heaven. This is terribly un-Christian and the RC Church would never endorse that idea. So I think we both agree on a balanced view of faith and works, with faith being the necessary element that works then derive from.

* I don't know why you see my definition of a Christian as confusing (I had said it is a baptized person who proclaims Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior). I have no problems with your further explanations of a Christian -- you simply expanded what I said! Yes, we must be baptized of water and the Holy Spirit, which is the first part of my definition. You also say that we must take up our cross and follow Him, which is certainly part of my second statement of proclaiming Him as Lord. So, a Christian is a person who is baptized, believes in Jesus as Savior, and then goes out into the world and proclaims Him as Savior (i.e., behaves like Jesus and spreads the Good News).

* You ask how could early Christians serve God before the emergence of Rome. Well, because they looked to Peter and

the other Apostles, who *were* the Church! In fact, this can be used to illustrate that the Bible was not an authority at the time, because it didn't exist. There is nothing special about Rome itself. But that is where Peter went and was martyred. Recall the ancient saying, "Where Peter is, there is the Church." If he had settled in Athens, we might well have Athens as the seat of teaching authority today.

* A common Protestant claim is one of freedom to interpret the Bible without external authority (*sola scriptura*). This appeals to modern ears because we are for the most part a literate people with ready access to the written word. But think back one thousand years -- wouldn't *sola scriptura* be an incomprehensible idea? The average person couldn't read, so had to rely on a teacher (priest). The Bible was not accessible, so how could it be the *only* authority? So I maintain, as does the Catholic Church, that the Bible is obviously authoritative, but the Holy Spirit guides the Church in applying the Word to each era, without ever changing the doctrines. If we are literate, then we should read the Bible, but then look to the Church as a lens to help focus the Bible.

* In my next exchange I will describe more about Vatican II and "salvation outside the Church." (Hint: there is no salvation outside the Church, but there may be salvation outside the *visible* Church.) For now, may I pose a question? Since we said that baptism is required, what would you say about those who -- in earlier times -- had no access to the Bible or to missionaries? Could someone in an aboriginal jungle of Australia back in 800 AD have had a chance at heaven?

* To continue about Mary, allow me to quote from your last email: "If for the sake of truth and clarity Catholics said Mary is the Mother of Jesus who shares godhood with his Father in Heaven, there would be no confusion or dispute. The normal Catholic usage leaves the impression that the clergy want folks to believe that Mary is the mother of God (all inclusive), but when a thinking person challenges the unreasonableness of this assertion, they can always fall back on the excuse, 'you misunderstand, we just mean the mother of Jesus who was divine'."

If I take that statement piece by piece: Yes, Catholics say Mary is the Mother of Jesus who shares godhood with his Father in Heaven. We are in agreement on that. Moving on: Do the clergy want folks to believe that Mary is the mother of God (all inclusive)? Yes, and this is the theological point where we diverge. Obviously, Catholics know that Mary did not pre-date God. She is merely a creature of God. Yet she was chosen to give birth to Jesus, who was God. You are thinking in human terms -- in linear time. I suspect this is why you also have a problem with the Mass as a sacrifice. The priest does not crucify Him at each Mass -- he makes the sacrifice of Calvary present to us. And it is not really the same as the crucified Jesus, but rather His glorified body that is made present. If you think in terms of linear time, it would be difficult to understand: How can the passion, death, and resurrection be rolled into one event called the Mass? Nevertheless, this is what is taking place.

Back to your statement about Mary: you claim that Catholics can always fall back on the excuse, "you misunderstand, we just mean the mother of Jesus who was divine." No, this would be heretical. Mary is the mother of Jesus, who was both divine and human. We cannot separate the two natures of Christ. So we're back to saying that she is the mother of God. (Since you like to read history, you should study more about how the early Church debated this very item, and declared Mary as "theotokos".)

* Finally, I don't seem to be convincing you about contraception. The prohibition on contraception is taken from the same authority that wrote Scripture: the Holy Spirit. Yes, prior to 80 years ago, there were other means of contraception. But even if we eliminate the *methods* of contracepting from our discussion, there is still a contraceptive *mentality* that can be sinful. A Catholic couple can use Natural Family Planning -- which can be an acceptable method -- but in their hearts they can still be sinning by their disdain for children. That judgement of the heart is not easy to ascertain (nor is it for me to judge), but I can definitely say that any couple using artificial contraception is sinning even if their intentions are acceptable! Let's look back to the case of Onan. You said that God punished him because he "refused to rear up seed (offspring) to bear his brother's name and inherit his possessions." But you overlooked my explanation: God Himself prescribed a *different* punishment for refusing to rear up offspring. In Deuteronomy 25:5-10, God says that such a man shall be shamed in public. So Onan's penalty of death was for a different reason. If you cannot find a suitable passage in the Bible to convince you about artificial contraception, at least think about the many examples of the relationship between "love-giving" and "life-giving." Simple biology tells us that these two are intertwined by God, and anyone who

chooses to divorce the two is perverting nature. (Sorry to be so blunt, but that's essentially what Christians have always believed until the Lambeth Conference of '30.)

While I am no Bible scholar, I do have a concordance (**Cruden's Concordance**, which is Protestant, I think). And I have a **New Bible Commentary** from Eerdman's, in addition to a Catholic Bible commentary. I also have a few Catholic apologetics books that have helped me to understand the ideas behind various RC teachings. (It's no surprise that I use my Catholic resources quite frequently, but I do study the Cruden's and Eerdman's books and I rarely disagree with them on anything.)

I shall sign off with my best wishes and prayers for God's guidance... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S NINETEENTH REPLY

Dear John B: Good to hear from you once again. My week has also been very busy. I am working on another book manuscript. It will be a book of **Answers to Bible Questions**.

* As to your reference books. Alexander Cruden's concordance is simply an index to the words used in the King James translation of the Bible. It is a marvelous tool that enables one to find any verse he is searching for in a matter of moments. Also it allows him to see in one listing all the verses that mention, Christ, baptism, church, etc. This was the only book done by Cruden but it has truly blessed the world. The New Bible Commentary from Eerdmans is very helpful. Should you wish to acquire other reference tools to use in your Bible study I will be glad to recommend good titles to you.

* As to artificial contraception. Paul teaches that the sexual privileges of marriage are for more than child production. "Because of fornication, let each man have his own wife, and let each woman have her own husband" (I Cor. 7:2). He goes on to say that neither partner should defraud the other of this marital privilege (I Cor. 7:5). Because of the natural biological needs of men and women, most people need the sanctity of marriage to satisfy them. This does not ignore the role of reproduction in marital sex, it only recognizes another reason for this gift. In the animal kingdom sex is only pursued as an act of reproduction. Love is not a factor. The inborn instincts of the creatures drive them to reproduce. Of all the creatures, man alone unites love and sex and he is so created that he expresses this love for his mate not only for reproduction but also for the mutual emotional and physical satisfaction of both parties. Husband and wife are truly one flesh. Onan's case has nothing to do with contraception in a marital relationship. It was a refusal to do his duty to his brother's family. The only possible application you could make of his case would be to the practice of "withdrawal." (Although I do not think that is a proper application). That is not what is done in artificial contraception.

* You say it is because I think in terms of linear time that I cannot understand or accept Mary being the mother of God. If I may kindly say so, your reasoning on this point reminds me of those heady medieval debates about angels standing on pinheads and the proper method of the brother's tonsure. Mary gave birth to our Lord Jesus at a specific place and a particular date in human history. Esoteric definitions are necessary in order to maintain your church's doctrine and claim that Mary is the mother of God. Simplicity is the hall mark of truth. When a doctrine has no biblical foundation and when it appears incredible to normal, intelligent people, that doctrine is suspect. From eternity the Word of God who was God, existed (John 1:1). Nine months prior to the birth of Jesus, the Holy Spirit caused her to conceive the child that was God's messiah. We agree that one cannot separate or divide the divine from the human in Christ, nor can we take a contradictory view that the creature gave birth to the Creator.

* I certainly agree with you that there is no salvation outside the church which you describe as the invisible church. It is a historical fact that Christ promised to build his church (Matt. 16:16-18); that he purchased it with his blood (Acts 20:28); that all the saved are added to it (Acts 2:47; I Cor. 12:13); that it is one and undivided (Eph. 4:3-4). I go a step further and observe that one can be saved and added to that church and never be a part of any denominational body including your Roman Catholic Church. The Lord's true church is of two dimensions. There is the divine, heavenly side which is perfect and occupies a spiritual realm and there is the earthly dimension that consists of all those who are faithfully worshiping and serving Christ according to his reveal will. Consisting of human beings, it is imperfect.

* If the Australian aborigine could be saved without the gospel being carried to him, then there would be no need of sending missionaries, nor of printing and supplying bibles. If he could be saved in 800 AD, his descendants could be saved today. If such were the case, the Great Commission of Christ would be without meaning (Mark 16:15-16).

* It seems you do not fully understand what is meant by Sola Scriptura...only the Bible. It is not just a "black book" with gilt edges of which this speaks. It is the inspired contents of the book. At first the heavenly message was in "earthen vessels" (II Cor. 4:7), i.e., inspired men such as Matthew, Paul, etc. They committed it to scrolls or papyri. Those inspired writings were the Scripture of the early Christians. Eventually they were gathered and bound into a single volume. These were hand copied and circulated among the churches. Only since the days of Gutenberg have we had a mass produced Word of God. Today that word can also be found on cassettes, CDs, in braille, etc. Still it is the authoritative teaching of Christ. Should an illiterate man hear the God's Word by means of radio, cassette or from a faithful teacher, he is still hearing and responding to the Bible alone.

* Your answer to my question, "What did Christians do before the church was planted in Rome?" is correct. The church existed long before it reached Rome. It began in Jerusalem on the Pentecost following the resurrection of Christ (Acts 2). It spread to other cities like Antioch and flourished. Had it never reached Rome, we would still have everything we have today, save Paul's instructions to the church in Rome which most likely would have been directed to some other congregation. The saying "Where Peter is there is the church," is true only in the sense that it was true of every Christian. The church on earth is the aggregate of God's saved people, whether in a particular community or throughout the world. It is not an institution such as Rome, the Anglican, the Orthodox or any other institutional body (I Cor. 12:27). Every saved person should go forth sowing the good seed of the kingdom of heaven.

* Having agreement on what constitutes a Christian, I propose that we next discuss what constitutes proper Christian baptism. The Bible shows us that it is a burial in water (Rom. 6:3-4). In apostolic times the candidate was taken down into the water by the administrator and baptized (Acts 8:38). The first Christians practiced only immersion. Being committed to doing bible things in bible ways, we follow that ancient practice.

* It is good that we agree that saving faith is obedient faith (Gal. 5:6). I would hasten to add that we are saved by grace through faith and that not of ourselves, it is the gift of God, not of works lest any should glory (Eph. 2:8-9). We are incapable of earning, meriting or deserving our salvation. It is the free gift of God in Christ Jesus (Rom. 6:23). God's grace is not however unconditional. Obedient faith is my grateful response to God's free offer of salvation, else all men, including rebellious unbelievers, would be saved. Any teaching that implies that by giving certain gifts or doing certain meritorious works a man can procure forgiveness is contrary to Scripture.

* As to indulgences, it being a rather profound point of difference, it seems it would be best to defer it until our next exchange so we can devote adequate space to it. I did discover that Gelasius, bishop of Rome in 495 said, "They demand that we should also bestow forgiveness of sins upon the dead. Plainly this is impossible for us..." Then in 1477 Pope Sixtus IV declared that indulgences were available for souls in purgatory. If as you affirm, the bishops of Rome are infallible in their teaching, I wonder how you would reconcile these contradictory affirmations?

Have a peaceful evening of rest. I remain your friend and fellow searcher for Truth, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTIETH LETTER

Hello again, pen pal. Thanks for the tips on Bible reference books. Might I also suggest for you a good reference if you wish to research Catholic teachings -- "Our Sunday Visitor's Catholic Encyclopedia" by Rev. Stravinskias. In the past you have quoted from a 1910 Catholic Encyclopedia. That information is still valid, but this newer version is more user-friendly, in my opinion.

* Regarding artificial contraception, you seem to have the notion that Catholics think sex is only for procreation. That has never been taught -- St. Augustine held that opinion, but in that matter he was wrong. You correctly note that sex is a two-fold gift from God, and this is what distinguishes us from animals. Up to this point we agree. But you see no problem with intentionally stifling one of the God-given aspects of sex when engaging in the act. By that logic, I presume that you would not consider bulimia to be an eating disorder. With bulimia, a young lady might engage in a delicious dinner (to partake of the pleasure) but then go throw up in the toilet (to circumvent the other aspect of eating). Catholics would say that this is immoral. The young lady need not desire both aspects, but they cannot be separated.

Since you cannot find any Scripture passage that speaks to this topic, I would recommend a Protestant book on the subject, "The Bible and Birth Control" by Charles Provan. I read most of it a few years ago, but it was a library copy so I can't look up the specific passages he cites.

* Mary as mother: You classify this with the tedious debates about angels dancing on pinheads. I agree that this topic is not as essential to Christianity as others (such as Jesus!). But it does get to the very essence of the dual nature of Jesus, thus it is not unimportant. In fact, every Catholic idea about Mary points to Jesus. Her most important saying in the Bible is found in John 2:5 -- "Do whatever He tells you." This is the focal point of any Marian teaching.

But regarding "mother of God," I would disagree with you that it is "incredible to normal, intelligent people." Yes, she gave birth to Jesus at a specific point in time and place, but let's fast-forward to the crucifixion and apply the same discussion. At the cross, God died a human death. And the Bible tells us that Jesus's mother was at the foot of the cross. By your logic we would say, no she was not the mother of that man on the cross, only his physical body. (Or you might say that God did not die a human death.) With all respect, I think that either of those two statements defies Christian sensibility.

Now, I admit that there is a paradox in here somewhere. But rather than deny Jesus as a divine person with two inseparable natures, Catholics believe that Mary gave birth to Jesus, who was both divine and human. How that fits in the order of linear time I do not comprehend. But one need not understand something to believe it, correct? Think about the ancient Christian teaching that the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son. Yet we say that the Holy Spirit is the "spouse" of the virgin Mary. This doesn't make sense in terms of linear time, yet most Christians accept this.

* Salvation outside the Church -- The Catholic teaching on this is that God desires everyone to be in heaven with Him. He gives them the necessary grace to do so, but many reject this grace and choose hell (see I Cor. 10:13). Therefore anyone who gets to heaven does so by the grace of God, through the death and resurrection of Jesus, whether they know it or not. Due to separation in time and distance, many throughout the ages could not literally be baptized and proclaim Jesus as their savior (we can use the Aborigine of one thousand years ago). I would think that he can be saved even though he never heard the Gospel preached to him. God cannot require of someone what is impossible. Obviously, that doesn't mean that we should not send missionaries -- just because someone can be saved does not mean we should withhold tools to make it easier. Now, here's where you would probably disagree: I say that anyone saved by the grace of God is a Catholic, although not a formal member. Since there is one Church, and I believe that Church to be visibly instituted in the Catholic Church, anyone saved is a de facto member, even though they do not know it. (I would say it's more difficult, since they do not have the benefit of the sacraments instituted by Jesus.) We consider Protestants to be Catholic, but not in the fullest sense. That is why I said that there is no salvation outside the Church, but there can be salvation outside of the visible Church.

* I accept your clarification of sola scriptura -- it is not literally the book itself, but the contents that we look to. Fair enough, but I still find that notion itself to be unscriptural. We've obviously covered this ground before, but I maintain

that the Bible in many passages can be interpreted to suit various beliefs. Think of our country's Constitution. The proponent of sola scriptura would say that we can ignore the Supreme Court and simply look back to the original Constitution. Don't you see how that can lead to trouble? The second amendment allows me to bear arms (as the founding fathers interpreted such). Does that mean that I in the twenty-first century can purchase any type of arms? No. I admit that this analogy has its limitations -- civil laws can vary, but God's word does not. Also, the way the Supreme Court has decided some things makes for a poor example. But you should still see why we need a living body with authority from a higher power to interpret the written word.

* I find it ironic that you quote the black preacher who says, "The Bible says it, I believe it, That settles it!" If Protestants really followed that statement, then there should be no problem with Communion as the body and blood of the risen Jesus, since our Lord said "He who eats my flesh and drinks my blood dwells in me and I in him" (John 6:56). Or what about Baptists, who refuse to admit that Jesus drank wine?

So when it comes to sola scriptura, I pose this question to all Christians: What should be our "pillar," or our foundation of truth? It is not the Bible, as sola scriptura might have you believe. The answer can be found in I Timothy 3:15.

* What constitutes proper Christian baptism -- I would just add one thing to your definition. John 3:5 says that we are to be baptized of water *and the Holy Spirit*. I read this not as a declarative statement, but an imperative one (meaning we must do so). I do not see Acts 8:38 as an imperative statement. It is true that the early Church baptized by immersion, but why do you insist that immersion is the only method? It may be a better reenactment and a noble idea, but baptism by pouring is just as valid. We agree that baptism is required to be a Christian. Yet you do not baptize children. Can children be considered Christians?

* As to indulgences -- may I correct you in your understanding of Catholic theology? No sins can be forgiven after death. That is Catholic doctrine -- and one reiterated by your mention of Gelasius. Indulgences are not forgiveness of sin. Therefore, the quotation from Pope Sixtus IV is just fine. Forgiveness removes the guilt of sin; yet the effects of sin still remain. Indulgences only relate to the effects of sin. (While you may disagree with that statement, it does make the two quotations that you cite quite compatible with one another.) Here's an analogy: A boy playing baseball breaks a neighbor's window. He goes to beg forgiveness. The man will forgive the boy, yet the boy still needs to pay for the window. This is the difference between forgiveness of sins and the effects of the sin. Now, when we sin against God, he can certainly forgive us, and he could even wipe out the effects of sin. But he does not always do so. Remember that David was forgiven, but still punished for his sin (2 Sam 12:13-14). Many times dealing with the effects can help us grow in holiness, to become more like Christ. Purgatory is a temporary state -- after death, and only for those who are saved -- where we grow in holiness, since few people are ready for the beatific vision of heaven right away. (Revelation 21 says that nothing unclean shall enter heaven.)

I hope that helps. I wish you and yours all the best for a productive and safe week... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTIETH REPLY

Dear John B: It is always a pleasure to hear from you and to discuss matters that pertain to our eternal well being.

* As relates to purgatory, you must agree that nothing about it is found in the 66 books of our Bible, only in the apocryphal book of II Maccabees which you previously mentioned. Jesus said nothing about it, nor did any of his inspired apostles. Perhaps you can tell me more about your church's teaching on Purgatory. What do the Catholics who go there experience? Are they happy or blessed? I have seen ads in Catholic publications offering to pray for "your loved ones in purgatory." A contribution was solicited for those praying. Just what would they be praying for? What do gifts to the church have to do with assisting those in purgatory? It is reported that John Tetzel of the Dominican order aroused the anger of the Catholic brother, Martin Luther, by selling indulgences to raise funds for the completion of St. Peter's church in Rome; that he did so by a special commission of the pope, whom I believe was Leo X. Tetzel it seems offered indulgences for a price. He promised that the souls of the deceased would be released from purgatory upon the

deposit of their friend's or family's gift in his chest. Did he not later offer indulgences for sins not yet committed? A set price for a particular sin? Whether the indulgence forgives the sin or lessens punishment for it, is a splitting of hairs. The consequences of sin is death (Rom.6:23). If the sin is forgiven, then the sinner will not be punished; if the punishment is waved the consequences are the same.

* We are agreed that baptism is a commandment of Christ. This is seen in Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16, 10:48. You ask why we insist that baptism must be an immersion to be valid. We do so because 1). That is the definition of the Greek word baptizo which means to dip, to plunge, to submerge (**Thayer's Greek Lexicon**). When Jesus was baptized he went to the Jordan, he was baptized and "went up straightway from the water" (Matt. 3:16). When the Eunuch from Ethiopia was baptized, "they both went down into the water, both Philip and the eunuch; and he baptized him" (Acts 8:38). Paul explains that "We were buried therefore with him through baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we also might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). Baptism is a symbolic re-enactment of Christ's death, burial and resurrection. We are buried with him, not sprinkled or poured. Your church recognizes that the ancient church baptized by immersion. The ruins of many of the oldest surviving churches in the Mediterranean world have their baptistry pools in which converts were immersed. Thus we have the meaning of the verb to baptize which means to immerse, the examples found in the New Testament, the teaching of Paul and the testimony of church history and the early fathers and of archeology. That makes a pretty solid case. Why would you not want to do what Christ and the first Christians did?

* I cannot answer for or be responsible for the teaching or practice of Baptists or other denominational bodies. I look to the Scripture. I seek to understand what it says on each subject and then I declare that to others as the will of Christ. I always cite to them the passage where that truth is found. We do not appeal to tradition, or to men regarded as great doctors of the faith. Paul reminded the Galatians that he did not receive his gospel from man (Gal. 1:11). If it is clearly taught in God's Word, honest folks can see for themselves that a certain point is right. If it cannot be established by Scripture, no one is obliged to accept it. The Lord's church is truly the pillar and ground of truth (1 Tim. 3:15). God's Word is that truth upheld (John 17:17). Look in your concordance and see how the prophets of God preached in ancient times. Hundreds of times they declared, "Thus saith the Lord." That approach is still valid today.

* Regarding the nature of Jesus, neither do I believe or teach that Jesus' two natures were separated after they were once mingled in his mother's womb. You would have to agree that the Word who was God (John 1:1) existed long before the fleshly body of Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb.

* Your statement about Sola Scriptura has serious implications. The Holy Spirit gave us the Bible. You say in many places it cannot be clearly understood, thus it can be interpreted to suit many various beliefs. Then you proceed to say that the pope can tell us plainly what it means. That implies that your human pope has greater ability and skills of communication than the divine Holy Spirit. What man can be superior in any way to the one of the god-head?

* We agree that God wants all to be saved (II Pet. 3:9). His divine grace is extended to all. To be saved however, man must believe in the Father (Heb. 11:6) and the Son (John 8:24) and obey him (Heb. 5:9).

* You say that the primitive man, far removed from civilization, can be saved even though he never had the gospel preached to him. Consider the following:

1. Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:6).
2. But faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).
3. Therefore one cannot have faith and be well-pleasing unto God without hearing the word of Christ.

If the primitive man can be saved without knowledge of God, Christ, the Scripture or God's instructions on how to meet the conditions of salvation, then there is no need to ask the missionary to sacrifice and place himself at risk...for the converts he might make would be saved anyway...even if he stayed at home. If the primitive man can be saved in his ignorance, why bother him with all the traditions, rules and expectations of Catholicism? Of course the fact is he is lost without Christ and thus we must take seriously our duty to preach the gospel to him.

* Does it not trouble you that your doctrine of the adoration of Mary is a tower of non-biblical legends and traditions built upon a handful of essential facts about this godly woman. She was a pure virgin. She was devout. She conceived

by the power of the Holy Spirit and bore the Son on God. She helped raise Jesus to manhood and followed him thereafter as a disciple. She was there at the cross and with the church in its beginning. These things the Bible clearly teaches. On the other hand, the doctrines of the immaculate conception, the perpetual virginity, that she was the mother of God, that she bodily ascended into heaven, that she reigns at the right hand of God, that we should pray to her, that she can answer our prayers and render special assistance, that we should bow before images of her...are all without biblical foundation. I have no trouble believing that Jesus was God in the flesh, that the Bible teaches (John 1:1). I do not need the traditions of Marian theology to establish that truth.

* One last comment on contraception. I am most willing to grant my Catholic neighbors the right to use his "natural family planning" without condemnation. You are not willing to grant me that privilege. I do that because the Bible does not directly address the subject. Only by deduction from general principles can I make a judgment on the matter. Your objections are founded on a verse that really has not relevance to limiting the size of one's family. It is a humanly originated rule of your church. Great numbers of your fellow-Catholics do not believe that the doctrine is sound, hence they ignore it and take steps to limit their offspring.

Have a pleasant evening of rest. Always be a searcher for truth. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-FIRST LETTER

Thanks for your email. I save a copy of each in one Microsoft Word file, and we have quite a work in progress!

* I'd be glad to share more about purgatory. Of course, we don't know much about it -- some early writers spoke of it as flames similar to hell, but only temporary. The Church never taught that officially. It seems that souls would be happy because their fate is sealed, but they wait to be led into the banquet hall.

There are four "last things": death, judgment, heaven, and hell. Notice that purgatory is not one of these final things. It is a temporary state of purification and perfection. As I mentioned before, the Bible says that nothing unclean shall enter heaven. If you don't accept purgatory, you are presuming that you will be ready for heaven at your death. Upon death, I also hope to be perfect, but isn't it possible that I can be imperfect even though I am saved? Purgatory is that final readying for the glory of heaven. It may be only a split-second or it could be years -- nobody knows.

We can and should pray for the dead. We do not pray for those in heaven -- they have achieved the eternal goal. And we do not pray for those in hell -- they too have no need for prayers. But we pray for those in purgatory, and we can offer sacrifices as fellow members of the body of Christ. Recall our previous emails about intercessory prayer. Just because someone has died does not separate them from the body of Christ. St. Paul said that we can lift each other up as members of the one body. This is what our prayers for the dead are. It is quite different from the Mormon practice of "baptizing" the dead. A deceased person's fate is sealed, even though there may still be preparation for heaven.

Protestants seem to have trouble understanding the concept of redemptive suffering. Things like fasting, giving alms (which is the solicitation you saw), and the aches and pains of everyday life can be offered to God for a particular intention (many Catholics fast one day a week for an end to abortion). We can also offer these things for those in purgatory.

The early Christian Church taught about purgatory. Those who broke from the Church opted to reject this teaching only a few centuries ago.

* You say that distinguishing forgiveness of sins from the repayment of the debt is splitting hairs? Why? The Bible is replete with stories about those who must repay their debts -- even if they are forgiven. To wave these off as splitting hairs seems to be avoiding an important aspect of God's plan.

* I never said that baptism by pouring is superior to immersion -- just that both are valid baptisms. The Catholic Church

recognizes immersion as its own historical tradition, and is moving more toward that once again, for some of the very reasons you cite. But are you saying that baptism by pouring is invalid? That is a difficult theological point to defend.

* You quote Galatians 1:11, where Paul states that he did not receive his Gospel from man, but in God's Word. What word is that -- since no books of the NT were available to him? He did not have our Scriptures to look to, so I imagine he didn't believe in sola scriptura.

* More about Mary: I agree that "the Word who was God (John 1:1) existed long before the fleshly body of Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb." Yes, but at the appointed time, she then became mother of Jesus, who was God! Again you are stuck on the time issue; do not think that the mother had to predate the Eternal Son.

* We had established in a previous email that some Bible verses can be misinterpreted. The Holy Spirit guides the Church in interpretation. You would say that the Spirit guides each person (which I can agree with). But the Holy Spirit also guides the leaders of the Church, whom Catholics and Orthodox maintain to be the bishops, the successors to the Apostles. Our human pope does not have any special skills as a man. But by his office, the Holy Spirit guides and protects his teachings in all areas of faith and morals. This was promised to us by Christ -- "I will be with you always." If Christ has not guided the shepherds that have occupied the office, then He has failed to keep His promise.

* Your 3-step description of faith coming from hearing the Word seems to go against the teaching that God wills the salvation of all. If missionaries fail to reach a foreign land by lack of zeal or logistical barriers, your statements would have the natives banished for all eternity by no fault of their own. Surely that doesn't make sense since you said that His grace is extended to all. Therefore, if human instruments fail in bringing the Word to the natives, God may have His own mysterious ways that He can save them. Which is what I said: if a person has no access to hear the Word, he can be saved by the grace of Jesus, even though he has not heard that precious name.

* There is no such Catholic doctrine as the adoration of Mary. Adoration is reserved to Jesus alone. That being said, the Old and New Testament refer to Mary and the dogmas about her in quite a few ways that might surprise you. Here is one: Catholics think of Mary as our mother. In fact, she is the mother of the Church. This comes from the Bible, where Jesus on the cross gave Mary to John (behold your mother). Another example is that we think of Mary as the ark of the new covenant. Recall the ark that held the Word of the old covenant -- its purity and splendor. Mary is the ark of the Eternal Word, Jesus. We can say that she is pure and radiant without that being adoration.

* I know we're trying to put the contraception issue to rest, but I'd like to address your comments. You say that we cannot make such a deduction from the Bible; but that it is a humanly originated concept by the RC Church. No, it is a God-originated concept clear from biology. Sex is designed for two people to express love, and that love can result in new life. Remember my analogy about bulimia having a two-fold nature -- I was interested to hear your response to that comparison.

We agree that homosexuality is wrong because the Bible says so. I would add that science also tells me so -- homosexual sex cannot ever result in new life because it perverts God's design for the human body. Wouldn't you say that contraception also goes against God's design for the human body?

* Finally, a point that I have addressed before. You bring up the fact that great numbers of Catholics do not agree with the immorality of contraception and have freely practiced such. I see that as no argument for what God's truth is. Are you saying that whatever the majority of Christians believe must by default be true? If so, we're all in trouble on many fronts!

I continue to be a searcher for truth... John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-FIRST REPLY

Dear John B: Sorry to be so tardy in responding. I was out of town for a few days and upon returning the catch up work was overwhelming.

* My point about many Catholics not accepting and abiding by their church's official teaching on contraception is, why should I the non-Catholic accept that which many of your own people do not? No, truth is not determined by what the majority believe or practice. Religious truth can only be known by what God has revealed in his Word...the Bible. There we find no instruction on the subject of limiting the number of our offspring.

* No, I do not accept or believe that contraception goes against God's design or the human body. First God designed the woman's reproductive system so that she can conceive only one to three days of the month. This shows that he does not expect the sexual act to always have reproductive results. If artificial contraception goes against God's design for the human body such does the Natural Family Planning method promoted by your church. The results are the same. Conception is avoided. Your method is one of several ways to limit the size of one's family. Some Catholics use their church's recommended method. Others use birth-control pills, others injections, others condoms. All limit their number of offspring while still expressing their intimate love to their mates.

* You protest that Catholics do not adore Mary. As Paul said to the Athenians, I have observed the objects of your worship, I see you pray to Mary. You believe that she can bless and protect you. You proclaim her the Mother of God. Your churches teaches that she is a mediatrix. You believe she is in heaven with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Webster's second and third definitions of "adore" seem to aptly describe what you do: "to regard with reverent admiration and devotion: to be extremely fond of...syn. Revere." As I observe the actions of many Mexican immigrants in our community I suspect that they even adore her in the same way that they worship and honor Jesus himself. I am satisfied to believe about Mary that which I read in the Bible. She was a godly young woman, favored of the Lord. She was a virgin. She was betrothed to a godly man named Joseph. She conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and brought forth God's Son, having never known a man. (Luke 1:26-37; 2:1-7). The wise men worshiped the babe but not Mary. She, along with Joseph, raised Jesus, but when he launched his career he made it clear that his family was "whosoever shall do the will of my Father who is in heaven..." (Matt. 12:49). Mary was there when her Son was crucified. On the cross, the dying Jesus committed the care of his widowed mother to his cousin John (John 19:26-27). She was with Mary Magdalene when the tomb was found open (Matt. 28:1). She was with the apostles and other disciples following his ascension into heaven (Acts 1:14). Following this there is no further mention of her. To this simple story Catholic teachers have attached a multitude of beliefs and practices all of which have absolutely no foundation in Scripture. These beliefs based on folklore and legend are rightly rejected by those who strive to be simple Bible Christians.

* God gave the Bible to humanity 1). To teach sinners how to be saved and 2). To show his people how to worship and serve him and live the godly life. No where does he tell us that "bishops" of the Catholic or Orthodox church are enabled by the Spirit to provide the correct interpretation. If that were so, how do you explain that Roman Catholic and Orthodox bishops have conflicting views of what the Bible teaches? If the Holy Spirit guides both, then the Holy Spirit is to blame for their conflicting conclusions. Nor does the Bible teach that the Holy Spirit in a miraculous way provides the meaning of Scripture to individuals. Again if that were so how would we account for the fact that rarely do two people see every point exactly alike? God gave us his Book and he gave us our intelligence. His book is designed so the average person can read and understand his duty to the Savior. If we cannot understand it, then we must conclude God is incapable of giving us a book we can understand. If we must have the Holy Spirit to tell us what it means, then we don't need the Bible, we could just ask the Spirit to tell us what we need to believe or do.

* You cannot simply wave aside the following facts:

Without faith it is impossible to be well pleasing unto God (Heb. 11:6).

But faith comes from hearing the word of Christ (Rom. 10:17).

Therefore sinners cannot be saved without hearing...or reading the words of Christ.

If the first two premises are true (They are statements from God's Word) then the conclusion is necessarily true.

This is why Christ placed evangelism as the first priority of the church (Matt. 28:19-20; Mk. 16:15-16). Just as it was

necessary for Christ to die before sinners could be saved, so it is necessary that man believe in Christ (John 8:24) before he can be saved!

* I stated that Paul insisted that he did not get his gospel from men such as Peter and the other apostles (Gal. 1:11). I did not say that he got his from the Bible. Remember the Holy Spirit was working through Paul and the other inspired authors to write for us our New Testament. The words of my Bible are from God. The decisions of your popes and councils are the words of uninspired men. Some were good men, some were not. Some were wiser than others. But the best of them were not endowed with the miraculous inspiration that the sacred writers had.

* I did not say that you count sprinkling to be superior to immersion, but you cannot deny the fact that your church for hundreds of years has preferred sprinkling over immersion. I suspect it is rare for a catechumen to be told that the teaching and practice of the early church was immersion. I rejoice to hear that some in your church are now tending in the direction of immersion. It is hard to go wrong when we do what God said, the way he said to do it and for the reason or purpose he declared. Consider the case of Naaman, the Syrian leper, who came to Israel seeking relief from his leprosy. The command of the prophet was to dip seven times in the Jordan river. Only when he complied did he get the desired blessing (II Kings 5:1-15). Would you not feel better knowing that you had complied with the command of God, in the way he prescribed?

* You may be able to cite someone from the second century or later who speculated about a place called purgatory, but you cannot find it in the Bible. In fact you can find a thousand things in the post-apostolic period but only those that agree with the teaching of the apostles and prophets of that first generation are to be accepted as God's truth. I fully appreciate the value of suffering for Christ. Suffering helps to burn the dross from our lives. It helps us discern between that which is truly important and that which is of secondary value. It strengthens us. But the Bible says, "After death cometh judgment" (Heb. 9:27). When we close our eyes in death we are either saved or lost. If we are saved, the blood of Christ "cleanses us from all sin" (I John 1:7). If purgatory were something we needed to know about, then God would have told us about it in his revelation to us. Think of that first generation of Christians who never heard of the concept!

* Neither Jesus nor his apostles told us to pray for the dead or to them. The Holy Spirit did write for us "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord (Rev. 14:13). This tells me that when a faithful Christian dies he has no need for a purgatory to prepare him for heaven.

Have a good evening. May we always have the spirit of the good folks of Berea...they searched the scriptures daily to see if these things were so (Acts 17:11). John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-SECOND LETTER

Hi Pen Pal: Another busy week -- thus my delay in writing back to you. I hope you had a happy Thanksgiving. I did! I also took extra time to read the book you sent me, so we can discuss that in our exchanges also. Thanks again for sending that. I could point out some things that I think are erroneous, but then again, those items are the basis for our entire discussion!

* One thing that intrigued me: In the article about worshiping on the Lord's Day (which I agreed 100% with), the writer quoted from Ignatius of Antioch (page 141), saying that he "is known as a reputable historian." Why does your faith group recognize some of Ignatius's quotes but not others? For instance, Ignatius also said, "[Heretics] abstain from Eucharist and from prayer, because they do not confess that Eucharist is the flesh of our savior Jesus Christ." In terms of time, Ignatius is about as close to the Apostles as we can get! Yet you choose to accept some of his beliefs and reject others, saying that the quote I give above is not in conformity to the Bible. But it is, if one reads John 6 in the correct light. So I see a problem in that you have an understanding of what the Bible says, and then you pick and choose which quotes from Ignatius and Justin Martyr you accept. Thus, you have become the authority.

* As far as the content of Ignatius's statement, notice that the sacramental presence of Jesus in the Eucharist was believed

from the beginning (Ignatius was writing around 100 AD!). A writer in your book claims that the doctrine of "transubstantiation" was created in 1560, at the Council of Trent (page 199). First of all, this is not true; it was officially defined in 1215 by the Fourth Lateran Council. But even that only represents an official definition by the Church, but certainly not when it was first believed. Christians only feel a need to discuss something and make proclamations when serious arguments arise and the faithful look to the Church to settle the matter (see Matt. 18:17). Ignatius shows clearly the belief in transubstantiation, even though that official word may not have been proposed until 1215.

* The Catholic Church has an astounding testimony of writers over the centuries that support Catholic beliefs. Consider Ignatius, Athanasius, Augustine, Cyril of Jerusalem, Jerome, John Chrysostom, Francis of Assisi, and many more. I can cite writings from each that support various Catholic interpretations of the Bible. As I understand, you believe that the Catholic Church went into apostasy, and was not the true Christian church from the second century or so. Then I ask, can you produce Christian writings from the early centuries that support your "true" Christian church? Did someone take issue with Ignatius, saying that Communion is merely symbolic? Or that Mary was not the Mother of God?

* Back to some of our previous items: You are missing a key point about Catholic teaching when it comes to contraception. Artificial contraception goes against God's design for the body. Natural family planning does not. To you, the results may be the same, but one perverts the natural act, and the other uses biological knowledge to avoid times of fertility. That is an objective statement, without taking into account the intentions of the couple (who do have the moral right to limit the size of a family, but not the moral right to pervert God's design). You claim that Natural Family Planning is one of several ways of limiting a family size. But it is the only one that does not divorce "love" from "life." Instead, the marital act is engaged in only during the non-fertile days. Again I equate this to eating. There is nothing wrong with wanting to limit my body weight. But to do so, I need to abstain sometimes. The immoral means would be to eat at any time, but take necessary means to divorce the food from its natural digestion process. Yet this is what artificial contraception does.

* I know that Protestants hold Mary in high regard, and that is as it should be. However, Catholic beliefs about Mary do not contradict Scripture: we call her "blessed" (from Luke 1:48) and queen of heaven (Revelation 12:1). Notice how Mary is indirectly mentioned in Genesis 3:15. Also, just as the ark of the OT held the Word, and that ark was resplendent, so Mary is the ark of the NT -- the Word was made Flesh (John 1:14). To hold the living God, she was also resplendent. Therefore, all Christians should see her as having a special place among all the saints of heaven.

* You ask how it's possible that Catholic and Orthodox bishops have opposing views, but I am unclear what beliefs you are referring to. Theologically, Catholics and Orthodox are in almost complete agreement; the main difficulty has to do with the Pope as a seat of authority (but neither group recognizes sola scriptura).

* Within one paragraph, you say that the Bible is the sole authority, yet you also point to "the fact that rarely do two people see every point exactly alike." Don't you see the irony in that? If the Bible is not interpreted the same by everyone, how can it be the sole authority? An analogy I have used before is the US Constitution. I would certainly not want that document to be the *sole* authority for our nation -- again for the same reason: ten people can interpret something ten different ways! Look at the First Amendment, preventing the state from designating an official church. If that were the sole authority, I might agree with those that want "In God We Trust" stricken from our money. But that is a very myopic reading of the "authority." So instead, we have a living authority (well, a three-branch system of authority). Of course, this living authority has decreed some interpretations that are quite immoral (Roe v. Wade), (Court decision legalizing abortion), but it is just an analogy.

* I agree with you that baptism and faith are required for salvation. And the Bible says that faith comes from hearing the Word of God. But if this is interpreted as strictly as you have done, then all humans in the Americas or Australia who lived before the 1600s are condemned to hell. The Catholic belief is that God wills the salvation of all (1 Tim. 2:4). And Christians are mandated to spread the Word of God. If someone hears the Word and rejects it, they are most likely doomed. But if a native, through no fault of his own, had no chance of hearing the Word of God, we would say that it is still possible for him to be saved (note that I said possible). God is not bound to normal modes of doing things. Perhaps He can move the native's heart in such a way as to love the Creator above all things, and secondly, to love his neighbor as himself (remember, these are the most important commandments). If the native does so to the best of his ability, and

does not reject the little truth that is revealed to him, how can you say for sure that he is not saved?

* I think the plate is full, so I will hold off on purgatory until next time.

Finally, as I sometimes do, I again want you to know that I mean no offense by my critiques of your beliefs and your book. I know you realize that -- we both believe strongly, and are simply trying to present our beliefs. I do encourage you to read some Catholic literature, especially those that are of an apologetic nature (I know of one called "Where Is That in the Bible?"). Also, if you have cable or satellite, there is "EWTN" Catholic TV, which has many great programs.

Wishing you the best, John-Paul Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-SECOND REPLY

Dear John B: Greetings. I trust you and your family enjoyed a great Thanksgiving holiday as did we.

* You say you agree that baptism and faith are required for salvation, but then you say it is not really necessary for a huge segment of humanity who are living in pagan darkness. It is true that God desires the salvation of all mankind (I Tim. 2:4; II Pet. 3:9). He expressed that desire by sending his only begotten Son to make their salvation possible. He has commissioned his people to carry the good news of His offer of salvation to all the world (Mark. 16:15-16). A person will be lost because of his sins (Is. 59:1-2; Rom. 6:23). His only hope of salvation lies in Jesus the savior in whom he must believe and whom he must obey (Heb. 5:9). We can rationalize and speculate about how they could be saved but such is only our puny human wisdom. Either we believe what God says or we do not. Your view means the idolater will be saved alongside of the Christian if he is a nice fellow. If such is true then Christ died for naught.

* You say that the fact that folks come to different conclusions about the Bible proves the need for a pope to speak the final word on the meaning of God's Word. Your argument fails in the face of the disagreements that have arisen among Catholics about the meaning of God's Word. Different popes have come to different conclusions about a multitude of things across the centuries. Persecution of non-Catholics was official policy of the Catholic church for centuries. Now that has changed. There was a period when two, or was it three, different men laid claim to the throne of Peter at the same time. The Catholic church has changed its policy on the relation of the church and state...at least here in America...where we do not allow a state church. There was a time when Catholic bishops told their parishioners how they should vote, but hopefully not now. Your church changed its view of the universe, after giving Copernicus a hard time about his new view. Under John XXIII the Roman church changed its attitude toward encouraging lay-persons to own and read the Bible for themselves. There was a time when Protestants were considered heretics, and lost. You indicate that has changed. The list is extensive. So having a pope has not guaranteed that your church is monolithic in faith and conduct.

* Leaders of Orthodox churches probably would not agree that they are virtually identical in faith with the Roman church. They allow married priests. They have triune baptism. They do not have images, they have a different head, etc.

* It is a simple thing to believe all the Bible says about Mary, the mother of Jesus. Rome has enlarged and embellished what God says about that noble lady and made of her far more than did He. To many minds, the role you assign to her and the veneration you pay to her borders on idolatry...the worship of the creature rather than the Creator (Rom. 1:22-25).

* As to your comparison of bulimia with contraception, I would note that bulimia kills its practitioners. Contraception can mean that a family has sufficient food for the children they choose to have. It can mean improved health for the mother whose body cannot stand the demands of additional pregnancies. Catholic couples seem to understand this better than their celibate leaders. To compare these two practices is the old mistake of comparing apples and oranges.

* I am glad you found time to read the **Introducing the Church of Christ** book. Of course we are familiar with the

writings of the early Christian fathers. As I have mentioned before I have the entire set of the **Ante-Nicean, Nicean and Post-Nicean Fathers'** writings, plus many volumes that analyze their beliefs and practices. The difference appears to be this: The Bible is my primary source. If I never heard of any of those post-apostolic leaders, I would still know every thing I need to know about how to be saved, how to worship and serve God, and what his church should be. For me they are secondary sources of information. Being uninspired writers, their words and thoughts can never take precedence over what the New Testament says. They are no different to me than scholars of Scripture of our day. I read, I evaluate what the contemporary scholar says in light of what the Bible says. If his thoughts harmonize with God's Word I accept them, if not I reject them. He might have some good thoughts and some that are clearly wrong. Of course many of the church fathers can be favorably cited for the views and practices of Roman Catholicism. They were caught in the current that was leading away from the simple truth preached by Jesus and his designated apostles into what would eventuate in a Romanized religio-political organization. Some of them introduced the errors that became the basic beliefs of the church of Rome and those under its power. I think you value them far more than is warranted. Remember that Paul predicted that in later times some shall depart from the faith" (I Tim. 4:1-2). When writing to the Thessalonians he wrote of that coming apostasy and noted "For the mystery of lawlessness doth already work..." (II Thess. 2:7). John the apostle warned his readers that "many false prophets are gone out into the world" (I John 4:1). Your leaders operate on the assumption that those who fell away were the minority who rejected the unfounded claims of the bishops of Rome. Others conclude that those who departed from the faith were in fact the majority party who turned from the simple teachings of the sacred writings and followed the traditions of men

* As to the "real presence" in communion. A child might hold a globe of the world in his hands and imagine that he has the world in his hands. We smile, knowing he only has a representation of the earth. A man might kiss the picture of his wife, and say I kiss you each night, but he is only kissing a symbolic representation of her. The bread and wine of communion are a memorial of Jesus' body and blood given on the cross. As he instructed, we take it "in remembrance" of him (I Cor. 11:24). You eat a wafer made of flour and drink the wine and say, "I have eaten Christ's flesh and blood." Yet when I pointed out that to actually do so would be to practice cannibalism, you retreated to say it was only a spiritual transformation. I think you can see the difference, but it is hard to cast off that which one has been taught from childhood; especially if to question it would be considered the most serious sin. Consider again the words of the Master: "I myself am the living bread come down from heaven" (John 6:51). This must be understood as a figurative expression. Jesus is like a never-ending supply of life sustaining food. You know he is not a loaf of bread. He taught, "He who feeds on my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life" (6:54). When he was saying these words those who stood before him did not think they would actually eat his flesh and drink his real blood. They were confused so he went on to explain what he meant. "It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words I spoke to you are spirit and life..." (6:63). He was saying that his teaching, if believed and followed, would lead them to salvation and eternal life. He was not in this passage discussing the Lord's Supper.

Have a good day. Let us search the scriptures daily...with an open mind to learn what God has to say to us (Acts 17:11).

Your friend in Christ, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-THIRD LETTER

John: I have a busy weekend, so I'll try to respond here today.

* We have a dilemma regarding salvation without hearing the Word. First, we both acknowledge that through time and distance, there have been numerous people who did not hear the Gospel. Now with that, we can have only three possibilities: 1. None of them are saved because they didn't hear the Word. 2. All of them are saved because it wasn't their fault. 3. Some are saved, but upon what basis, since they had no chance at hearing the Gospel? You adhere to the first choice, which comes from a very literalistic reading of the NT. I believe in the third choice, but I do not know what the basis is. I never claimed that an "idolator will be saved alongside of the Christian if he is a nice fellow." But on the other hand, you should not attempt to put God in a box when normal means seem impossible.

* Recall that the Good Thief was promised paradise by Jesus Himself, yet the Good Thief was not baptized! Would this convince you that God can make exceptions to the "water baptism/proclamation of faith" requirement?

* Several of your points can be answered by clarifying what the Church teaches as unchangeable vs. changeable things. As I've pointed out before, any teaching officially promulgated, that deals with faith or morals, is understood to be infallible. Thus, if the pope said that Mary was not a virgin, that would be a huge problem. But all the points you bring up (married priests, how to vote, etc.) fall outside that realm. This may sound like a convenient way to sidestep the debate, but that has been the constant understanding, and one clarified specifically in the First Vatican Council. (By the way, if you research the Galileo controversy, you'll see that the RC Church never officially condemned the sun-centered theory; they only harassed him to stop teaching it until more evidence came forth. Even that was a mistake, I admit, and the pope apologized for it a few years ago. But that did not have anything to do with faith and morals.)

* Very, very few of our differences with the Orthodox Church are theological. You mentioned the following:
--a different head (yes, they do not recognize the pope, but that is a question of authority, not theology)
--married priests (again, that is a discipline, not a theological point)
--trine baptism (what do you think we have? "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit")
--images (have you never seen the elaborate icons of the Orthodox Church?)

* The bulimia example was an analogy, and no analogy is perfect. But I don't think that can be fatal, can it?

* My point about the multiple interpretations of the Bible related to those passages where there are multiple or confusing interpretations. Certainly a Christian would reject any teacher that says Jesus is not the Son of God. That is clear in Scripture. But if I may use Communion once again as an example, Jesus says in John 6, very clearly, that "my flesh is real food." Admittedly, I interpret that differently from you, and I do understand your view based on John 6:63. But I could make a strong case also. Of course I realize, based on physics, that it still looks and tastes like bread. So it is not a physical transformation. But neither is it a spiritual transformation. We say it is a sacramental transformation. Catholics are accused of cannibalism. I do eat the body of Christ, but it is not dead flesh, which is the definition of cannibalism. Rather, it is His living flesh; the flesh of His glorified body. And if we look at how other early Christians interpreted Communion, we see that they too thought of it as the Body and Blood of Jesus. So when a topic can be interpreted different ways even within the context of the Bible, why go against the view seen by the early martyrs?

* One other question arose as I was reading your book. There was a chapter explaining how miracles ceased after the Apostles died. Does your faith group recognize countless miracles that have taken place since then? I do not blindly accept every little thing like weeping statues, but there have been documented cases of a Communion host that changed to physical flesh. Or what about medical miracles (not the kind dramatized by televangelists who push the person backward onto the floor)? And have you heard of the 20th-century priest St. Padre Pio?

I've heard some Protestants say that any purported miracle like these has to be the work of the devil. But the Bible says "by their fruits you shall know them," and many of these miracles have borne great fruit -- fruit that I doubt the devil would have caused. Just curious as to your thoughts about these unexplained things...

* Back to purgatory. Like you, Catholics say that there are only two places we'll end up at: heaven or hell. Purgatory is a temporary state (I don't think it's a "place" just like heaven and hell are not "places"; nor does purgatory have any "time" that we know of). But purgatory is simply that process where we are bridged between our imperfect self at death and the perfected Christian we are to be in heaven. Surely you admit that even those who are saved are not perfect. Yet in heaven they will be. So there is some sort of perfecting, right? It is not a "second chance" as you seem to think. It does not forgive sins. Yet, I may die with all my sins forgiven, but still have an unintentional attachment to sin or some other imperfection. So when we pray for a deceased soul, it is not to tip the balance between heaven or hell, but rather to speed them along to heaven, if they lived a life deserving of such.

* This may tie in with purgatory, but why don't Protestants make a distinction between major and minor sins? You may have heard the Catholic terms "mortal sin" and "venial sin." While some may scoff at this, it is quite clear from 1 John 5:16-17.

Let us pray for peace in the world and unity among all Christians. Have a great weekend! John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-THIRD REPLY

Dear John B, Fellow Searcher for Truth: Good to hear from you again. I trust all is well with you and those you love. God continues to bless us in every way. By all means, my daily prayers include petitions for an end to the war and the realization of peace on earth and good will among men. I also pray that God will hasten the day when all who love Him will stand united under His Son and our King, Jesus.

* Of course there are major and minor sins. But all sins are transgressions of God's law (I John 3:4) and must be repented of and forgiven. Forgiveness is the exclusive privilege of God through Christ. He has not delegated that to any man or group of men. A better verse to show that some things are of more moral and spiritual value than others and the failure to do them of greater consequence is Matt. 23:23-24. The Pharisees had left undone the "weightier matters of the law, justice, and mercy and faith..." It is a serious mistake for a person to reason, "this may be wrong, but it is not big matter."

* The most serious flaw in your doctrine of purgatory is that it implies Christ and the Holy Spirit are not sufficient and capable of transforming a saved person in order that he can enter heaven. When one truly is saved, he is "in Christ," he is "a new creature (creation): the old things are passed away, behold, they are become new" (II Cor. 5:17). Again Paul says of Christians, "beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from the Lord the Spirit" (II Cor. 3:18). By our own efforts we cannot attain perfection in this life, nor can one in purgatory, be he there a thousand years. Christ in us is the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

* As to miracles. Without question Christ and the apostles wrought mighty works (miracles) and so did those disciples on whom they laid their hands and conferred the gifts (Mark 16:17-20; Acts 8:14-19). We do not doubt that God is capable of intervening in nature and in the lives of men to bless or punish to this day and sometimes does so. The thing we deny is that he currently works through men as he did in the first century. The supernatural gifts given to the early disciples filled their purpose of confirming their message as from God and ceased when "that perfect thing came" (I Cor. 8-10). The word translated "perfect" used by Paul is of neuter gender. This indicates it does not refer to Christ...(him) or the church (she) but a perfect thing, the finished Word of Christ, our New Testament. The legends, fables and miraculous claims of your church are more extreme than those of the Pentecostal preachers. I suspect that your education and enlightenment make it hard for you to believe the story of Pilate's staircase being miraculously transported to Rome, or the claims of the wood of the cross, and thousands of sacred relics with the stories of the miracles attached to them. I recall reading about the two different "skulls of John the Baptist" deposited in churches in Italy, or was it three? Yes, there are all of those weeping statues and the communion host turning red, etc. As to how we explain some of the stories of people made well at Fatima, and Guadalupe. Devout people who do not think for themselves, are regularly taught that miracles are performed each day as the priest lifts up the host, and in thousands of other ways. With all their hearts they believe that such can happen. They fear to deny what their church tells them it can do. With their deep faith they believe and hope that God will work a miracle for them. We know of the power of the mind over the body as demonstrated in hypnotism. Infirmities that are psychosomatic in origin can be overcome by "holy men" and shrines, etc. Remember that Muslim, Hindus, Mormons, Pentecostals, Cults of all sorts and kinds claim the same kind of miracles. So do voodoo priests. Their followers will testify to the "miracles" they have wrought. But we know they are forgeries. As to Satanic miracles, remember the pseudo miracles of Pharaoh's magicians. Those who claim to have the ability to work miracles like the apostles, I challenge to walk of the water, drink the poison, pick up the poisonous snake and raise the decaying body of a dead man.

* I have pointed out to you that even with your popes there are and have always been different opinions of things among Catholic teachers. In days past when the voice of the pope was not sufficient to quieten the dissident, imprisonment, torture and death were used to silence them. Were such procedures ordered by an infallible decree? It does seem that your theologians have created a system that allows sufficient wiggle room whenever one points out that Catholic thinking is certainly not monolithic. It is convenient to be able to dodge the bullet by saying, "Oh, that's not included in infallibility." So "the pope is infallible, except..." When a controversy arises he is fallible until he issues a decree from

the throne. At that point he becomes infallible. If he is infallible in those few cases, why does he need the input and counsel of his curia? If the popes can be mistaken on things "not classed as faith and morals" how can the layman be sure he is infallible on those other matters?

* The Orthodox churches baptize by a threefold immersion...they immerse the candidate three times. Is the mode of baptism a matter of faith? They also reject the idea of purgatory. They reject the dogma that the pope is the sole vicar of Christ on earth, also papal infallibility. They acknowledge only the first seven general councils. These things I point out, not to endorse the views of the Orthodox church but to remind you there are formidable differences between them and your church, not simply matters of procedure.

* As to the salvation of those who have not heard the gospel of Christ, if God in his mercy should choose to save one or all of them, no one could make a legitimate complaint. Saving the lost is the exclusive prerogative of God. All who have been privileged to hear the good news of Christ and claim his salvation are in no way worthy of the blessing. They are saved by God's grace through faith...and that not of themselves (Eph. 2:8-9). For us to complain that another sinner was also saved would be totally inappropriate. On the other hand, you can read your New Testament through and not find any promise that those sinners who do not become Christians will be saved. Note that when Jesus comes he will render "vengeance to them that know not God, and to them that obey not the gospel of our Lord..." (II Thess. 1:7-8). Two categories of lost souls are seen at judgment: those who never knew God and those who knew him but refused to obey his gospel. The same punishment awaits both. To promise salvation on any other basis is presumptuous toward God and deceptive to the lost.

* The salvation of the Thief on the Cross is easily explained. The New Covenant of Christ was not ratified until his death occurred (Heb. 9:15-18). When Jesus' conversation with the thief occurred, the Old Covenant of Moses was yet in place. Also while a man is alive he can distribute his possessions as he wishes. But when he dies, the instructions of his will take effect. While alive, Jesus could save a person without baptism if he so desired, but once he died, the instructions of his will become binding. We live under the will of Christ. One other thought it is possible, that is the thief had been baptized under the teaching of John the Baptist, Christ or the apostles and then reverted to his old life of sin. Multitudes of Jews were baptized of John (Mark 1:54-5).

Best wishes for the holiday season. May God's richest blessings abide on you as you seek his way. John Waddey

P. S. I am glad you found time to read my book. When we write or teach we always point the hearers or readers to the teaching of God's Word which is the only authority. We are like sign posts pointing the way to the Christ. JHW

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-FOURTH LETTER

Wow -- I've been quite busy these past two weeks. Know that I did not forget you! I'll take the opportunity here to wish you and your family a blessed Christmas. I think you have said that you do not celebrate Christmas as a holy day. As you've pointed out before (and Catholics are perfectly aware of this), we don't know the date of Jesus' birth. But as we are creatures who operate on cycles, it is fitting that we remember the Nativity in some way during the Christian yearly cycle (even if it was introduced to replace a pagan holiday!). So again, all my best...

* I am glad we agree on the Bible's distinction between deadly sin and other sins. (Sometimes I throw these topics out there because I do not know your beliefs on an issue -- this particular one is sometimes debated between Catholics and Protestants, but here you and I agree.) The Catholic Church would also agree with your assessment that *any* sin is a transgression and must be avoided. Just because something is "venial" doesn't mean we can go ahead with it. Some Catholics may have that opinion, but be assured that this is faulty theology!

* I think you are overlooking the facts about purgatory. While Jesus' death and resurrection was sufficient in every way, it is clear that we still must cooperate with Him and turn from every form of imperfection (see Matt. 5:48). Even those who are "saved" may still have imperfections at their death. For example, if you died today, we shall hope that you go

directly to heaven. But is there not one area of your life in which you might want God to then "complete" that perfect transformation? That's all that purgatory is. And it is in complete harmony with Scripture. Another point that may help here is to reopen our discussion of the Old Testament books (Greek vs. Hebrew, etc.). Realize that the Apostles and other New Testament Christians recognized the full canon, including the apocryphal books. In fact, many of the OT citations found in the NT are from this Septuagint. I say this because we can then look to 2nd Maccabees for more about the reality of purgatory.

* Regarding miracles, I think it is quite a stretch to say that the "perfect thing" mentioned in 1 Cor. 13:10 is the New Testament writings. Take no offense, but this is your interpretation, and this simply illustrates the danger of personal interpretation without looking to the living, visible Church. The "cessation of miracles" theory is not biblical. However, at the same time, I would say that miracles are no longer essential: in Jesus we have everything we need to believe. Now, you accuse the RC Church of creating "fables and legends." Do you not believe the testimony of thousands of witnesses (both Christian and non-Christian) at Fatima in 1917? What about the bleeding host that you yourself are welcome to examine at Lanciano, Italy? There are unquestionably miracles that still occur, although some may say they are not of God. You say that my "education and enlightenment" should preclude me from believing things such as the moving of Pilate's stairs. I know nothing about that one, but I would say that my education and enlightenment should prevent me from believing that a man named Jesus rose from the dead! What is a few miracles to the God who can conquer death? So while we can both look upon some of these miracles with skepticism, don't be too quick to eliminate the supernatural. The RC Church says that we should always investigate normal explanations first; such as medical/psychosomatic healings, and yes, even fraud. But I offer the two miracles mentioned above among those that you should look into.

* You asked if such practices as torture, imprisonment, or death were issued by infallible decree. No, recall that only official teachings about faith and morals are infallible. I know there were terrible, even murderous popes. But guess what -- they never once messed with the deposit of faith handed down from the Apostles. Don't you think it would have been easy for one of them to say that torture is OK under such-and-such circumstances? But they never taught that, despite the very actions they may have been committing. While you might say that this is convenient, this is essential to the preservation of truth. God has used human instruments to convey his truth -- both in the written and oral teachings. And being human, no pope was perfect. But despite their bumbblings, the truth has persisted through 2000 years.

* On that same topic, you asked how a layman can be sure if the pope is infallible, since he receives counsel from the curia and bishops. Simply because he asks for input does not affect anything. It allows him to consider all angles before making a decision. The Holy Spirit will guide him in the final decision -- for that we have the assurance of our Savior Himself. So it is not difficult even for the layman. If the pope says that all churches shall be built of drywall and wood framing, we should listen and try to obey -- because of his office -- but that is not an infallible statement, since it is not related to faith and morals.

* I think we have found some agreement on the (possible) salvation of those who have not heard the Gospel. My only point was that, while the Bible makes many clear statements, God is not bound to these rules as strictly as we are. If He chooses to make Himself known to a jungle native -- even though the name "Jesus" might not be mentioned -- it is possible for that man to go to heaven. I like how St. Thomas Aquinas said it: "God is not bound to the sacraments."

* A question for you: Since your group does not use instrumental music in worship, does that mean that a Church of Christ building has no instrument of any kind? I'm thinking of a wedding, or other non-Sunday meeting. Would it be allowed for a bride to have organ music?

* Finally, I again challenge you to produce historical writings that support your interpretations of the various items we've been discussing. Your attempt to follow the exact beliefs and practices of the Apostles is noble, but to interpret things 2000 years removed from the writing of the NT is to overlook many things, and this has caused you to deny teachings that were embraced by the immediate followers of the Apostles! I am not speaking of 400 AD but rather folks like Ignatius and Polycarp who were direct pupils of the Apostles. Where are the writings that support your interpretations of the Bible, some of which contradict the Church of 100 AD?

We are both seekers of truth, although we differ in many areas. I pray often that all Christians will be united, as I'm sure

you do. Not only is that the will of God, but it would greatly help our efforts to spread the Gospel to those in our world who see our divisions as reason not to believe.

May God's peace be with you, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-FOURTH REPLY

Dear John B: Good to hear from you again. I hope all is well with you and your loved ones and that you are enjoying this festive season.

* As you and your church and most of the Protestant world celebrate the Christmas holy day, keep in mind your words, "it is fitting that we remember the Nativity in some way during the Christian yearly cycle (even if it was introduced to replace a pagan holiday!)." The day selected by God for us to remember Christ is the first day of the week, the day of his resurrection and triumph over death (Acts 20:7). Bishop Liberious gave you Dec. 25th as a day of celebration.

* You close with a challenge that I produce historical writings to support our faith and practice which are based on clear New Testament instruction. Imagine that you were the administrator of a person's will. Now that he is deceased it is your task to distribute his possessions according to his written instructions. If a relative should appear and argue that he and his offspring should be included in the distribution. He claims he can produce numerous witnesses (most of whom lived much later than the deceased) who will testify that he should be included; that such was the intent of the deceased. You are there with his written instructions in hand and the claimant is not mentioned. Would you listen to the several witness he brought forth or would you be obligated to follow the instructions of the will? The New Testament is the last will and testament of Christ (Heb. 9:16-17). With that in hand we have no need to hear the testimony of those who came years afterward. You need their testimony to support your church's beliefs and practices that are not in compliance with New Testament instruction. We do not.

* As to musical instruments. Our objection is to the use of musical instruments used in worship. A wedding or a funeral service is not a worship service of the church. Therefore one may or may not use them in such events. Each congregation is autonomous and guided by her elders. Should the elders grant permission to bring a piano, etc. to the building for a wedding, that is their prerogative. If they decide not to grant the request, the members should comply. I remind you that no church used instruments until Pope Vitallian sought to introduce an instrument in 670 AD. His attempt created such a stir the matter was dropped and some 400 years passed before such became a common practice. Thus our practice is in harmony with that of the early church. Yours emerged in the dark ages and without biblical authority.

* Your thought that God might choose to make himself known to some jungle native reflects your wish and desire that they might escape the consequences of their sin. However there is nothing in the revelation of God's will to us that suggests that he will do so. He placed the burden on his people to go preach the gospel to every creature, including those in heathen darkness (Mark 16:15). Whether God might choose to extend mercy to such people is an unknown matter. We dare not encourage any one to build his hope of salvation on such an unknown factor.

* You acknowledge that "I know there were terrible, even murderous popes." Does not this fact give you reason to pause and ponder your allegiance to a system built upon such unworthy men? Those wicked popes were chosen by the cardinals. Such was said to be God's choice for his church. Do you not believe they were guided by the Holy Spirit in their decision? Was the Spirit mistaken in that choice? Devout Catholics at the time thought and believed they were God's Shepherds over their souls. They obeyed their commands, believed their edicts and bowed before them, kissing their ring. Only later was it revealed how unworthy they were. In some cases it was centuries later. Every decision and decree issued by such evil men was tainted by their wickedness. What would such evil leaders know about Christ's will for his church? Christ you can trust implicitly. His New Covenant is altogether true and dependable. Note so sinful men.

* As to miracles. To the non-Catholic, the alleged miracles of your church have no more validity than those of the various Pentecostal sects and cults who claim also claim that God is performing mighty deeds in their midst. For the same reason you would smile and reject them, I smile and reject your miraculous claims. That claims are venerable with

years and believed by multitudes gives them no more validity. The only difference I see is that the miracles claimed by your church are bigger, grander and more elaborate than those of the small sects. I have every reason to believe the miracles recorded in the Bible actually occurred. I have a divinely given and certified record of them. The latter day miracles of your church and others are suspect. A superstitious people are easily led to believe in miracles and apparitions. Out here we have an endless stream of Catholics who have found the image of Mary in a breakfast roll, in the design of the grain of a wooden door, in the rust stains on sheet metal, in the bark of a tree, in a shadow on a wall. In each case a multitude of Catholics lined up to see the blessed image. The fellow with the breakfast roll sold it for quite a handsome price. In those nations where Catholicism is strongest, superstition abounds. Remember, no matter what is claimed by your people as a miracle, they cannot perform the kind of miracles done by Christ and the apostles. They cannot walk on water, they cannot raise the dead. They dare not take up deadly serpents or drink poison (Mark 16:17-18). When we combine the power of psychosomatic illness and of unquestioning faith we can account for the greatest number of those cases who claim they were healed by workers of miracles. Since you reject with a wave of the hand my explanation of I Cor. 13:8-10, perhaps you could tell me what it does mean. Also explain why the alleged miracles of your church are not in all aspects like those of the Master and his apostles.

* As to your reasons for Christians needing a stay in purgatory to finish refining and purifying us for heaven, you concede that "Jesus' death and resurrection was sufficient in every way." Yet by saying that at death we still need to work on improving ourselves, demonstrates that your practice does not measure up to your belief. Any and all who are saved will receive that heavenly blessing by the grace of God (Eph. 2 8-9). While in this life we grow in his grace and knowledge (II Pet. 3:18) and are transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom. 12:1-2), when life is over the angels escort us to Abraham's bosom where we rest in peace waiting for the resurrection of our bodies (Luke 16:22; John 5:28-29). After death cometh judgment (Heb. 9:27). He that dies saved will be saved in eternity. He that dies lost will suffer the consequences in the life beyond. At the root of the doctrine of purgatory is the concept of salvation by works of human merit. This of course flies in the face of the many passages that teach that man is saved by grace through faith and not by works done in righteousness which we did ourselves (Tit.3:5). This was one of the points of conflict in the Protestant revolt.

* As to the Septuagint and the apocryphal books. The Septuagint was a translation into Greek of the Hebrew Bible plus some of the apocryphal books. I remind you it was a translation, the work of uninspired men, just as was Jerome's Latin Vulgate and every other translation from that time to this. That those men, in Grecianized Egypt, included books of doubtful origin is not sufficient proof that they were indeed inspired books. The Hebrew canon never included those disputed books. Yes, they used them just as we use good religious and devotional books written by wise and good men. But just as we would not equate them with Scripture, neither did the Hebrews treat the apocryphal books as equal to their Scripture.

God be with you and yours. Enjoy a wonderful holiday season. May the peace of Jesus be with you in the coming year.
John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-FIFTH LETTER

Hello again friend: Since my last response was so long in getting to you, I will make up for it today with quick turn-around time! As usual, I will address your points in order...

* While we are to remember Christ on the first day of the week, we are called to reflect on different aspects of Christ's life throughout the year. Based on your feelings about Christmas, I presume you teach the same about Easter. Catholics say that every Sunday is a "little Easter," but it is still essential to remember that most glorious feast in a special way each spring. At a Catholic Mass, we focus on different Scripture passages each Sunday, so as to learn more about God in digestible chunks. Hence, Christmas is just a time to reflect more intimately on the Nativity. That day was proclaimed such by Bishop Liberius, but so what? It is equivalent to you telling your congregation that you will study the multiplication of the loaves and fish during your service of February 11, for example. That date (Feb. 11) was not commanded to you as such by God. But you are trying to get your flock to focus on a Gospel passage. Well, the same

goes for Christmas.

* When I asked you to show supporting writings for your biblical interpretations, I was not asking for infallible writings -- the Bible is of course the infallible word of God. But I ask what writings of second-century Christians share your interpretation. Again, I realize these would not be infallible. But don't you think someone would have written a letter or sermon to clarify that Communion is not the body and blood of Jesus? There are none, but there are several that reinforce the Catholic interpretation of John 6.

Secondly, your analogy of a will actually supports the Catholic position! If we take the Bible as the "will," we see that there are some passages that are very clear, and others that are not so clear. The early Church "read the will" and believed and taught accordingly. Thus, the Eucharist is truly the body and blood of Jesus; the Church is a visible entity built upon Peter; the Apostles heard confessions and absolved sins (John 20:22); they appointed successors (Acts 1:20), etc. These are just a few of the Catholic tenets that were clear to the second-century Church. Then fourteen hundred years passed, and the Church splintered (not the first splinter, of course, but many of your beliefs stem from this Protestant revolt). After all those centuries of having understood the "will" one way, Protestants now try to "re-read" the will: Gone is the Eucharist as body and blood. Gone is original sin. Gone is the intercession of saints. And later, gone is the prohibition on divorce. I think it is better that the "will" be read in light of the testimony of the Christians of those early years.

* I consider the topic of musical instruments to be "second-tier": it's worth discussing, but not essential to our more profound theological discussions. I had asked about the wedding example merely out of curiosity. A worship service can be quite beautiful *a cappella*. At the same time, I would say it's going overboard to have instruments completely prohibited during Sunday worship with your evidence being that it's not mentioned in Scripture. If you are that literalistic, then we should not use English (nor Latin) during worship, but Aramaic and Hebrew!

* From your last email: "Your thought that God might choose to make himself known to some jungle native reflects your wish and desire that they might escape the consequences of their sin." I would say no: My thought reflects not my will, but Scripture, which states that God wills the salvation of all. But I do agree with you that "We dare not encourage anyone to build his hope of salvation on such an unknown factor." And I was not denying the missionary call; I was only saying that it's *possible* for the native to go to heaven -- a point which you initially denied.

* Regarding sinful popes, I have two responses. First, I would reason that if the RC Church were not the one established by Christ Himself, and protected by Christ Himself, then this institution would surely have collapsed long ago due to sinful and incompetent leaders! Instead, the Church has persevered despite such sinful leaders. And secondly, you seem to place the papal office in higher esteem than Catholics do -- a pope is not supposed to be perfect, even though he is the earthly shepherd. (Jesus is the One Shepherd, but remember that he told Peter to "feed my flock.") If sinful shepherds are proof of an illegitimate church, then look at Peter, who denied Christ three times -- after being named the rock!

* Like you, I smile at most of the crazy "apparitions" of Mary in the breakfast roll, etc. The examples I cited have a bit more substance to them, and cannot be explained away quite as easily as an image in a wooden door. But my main point was that you can't say that miracles don't occur in today's age (and I don't think you said that, but you say that men cannot "call down" miracles). So perhaps we can agree on the following?: God continues to give us miracles for various reasons -- as a loving Father, he can grant miraculous cures, for instance. Or he can give us miracles as signs to help our belief. We cannot designate certain people as miracle workers, however. They may pray with us or over us about a problem (see James 5:14), but cannot call down miracles as those in the NT did.

* While I agree that all necessary revelation ended with the Apostles, I read 1 Cor. 13:10 in a different context: love (charity). Reread the beginning of that chapter; Paul writes about tongues, but without love, they are worthless. He does not say, without *scripture* they are worthless. Next comes the famous "love is patient, love is kind" section. Which brings us to verse 8. "Love never fails. If there are prophecies, they will fail." Then he goes on to say "when the perfect comes," meaning perfect, true love -- love being the theme throughout that chapter, and into the next. So that whole section is a contrasting of prophecy and tongues with complete God-like love, which trumps everything.

* When I speak about purgatory, it is not for us "to work on improving ourselves." Rather, it is where God works on

improving us. Yes, Jesus' death and resurrection were sufficient in every way. But in addition to being baptized and accepting Jesus, we must turn completely to God -- this is the hard part -- to be perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect (Matt. 5:48). Like gold that's tested in fire, we sometimes must be purified so that we are worthy to enter heaven. Thus, Jesus' death and resurrection are sufficient, but purification is often required.

You say that the root of purgatory is the concept of salvation by works of human merit. This is not at all what the Catholic Church teaches. Salvation comes through the grace of Jesus Christ by His death and resurrection. But recall St. Paul's words that he makes up "what is lacking in Christ's afflictions" (Colossians 1:24). He is speaking of suffering. A person who suffers is sometimes being purified. This is not "merit" but it is God's helping us turn to Him, even in the midst of pain. Purgatory is the completing of this purification. All Christians believe that there is death, judgement, and an eternal heaven or hell, just as you said. So this was really no basis for the Protestant revolt. For another reference, see 2 Tim. 1:18, where Paul prayed for his dead friend. Why do that if there is no purgatory?

* Jesus and the Apostles regarded the Septuagint as inspired scripture, as evidenced by numerous OT references in the New Testament (I can supply several examples to show this if desired). There was the Palestinian (Hebrew) canon that was also floating around, but was still in flux, and it was not formalized until about 90 AD, by rabbis at the Javneh councils. (These councils were to fend off the new Christians.) Research any Bible from the fifth to the fifteenth century still in existence, and you will see the full Septuagint OT canon. In the 1500s, Luther rejected the deuterocanonical books and used the Hebrew canon, which Jews had been using. The Council of Trent decreed more forcefully the official canons for both OT and NT. So when Catholics are accused of inserting the extra books at Trent, it is misleading, since these books had always been accepted by Christians, and then merely decreed formally by Trent in response to Luther.

Best wishes and peace, John Paul Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-FIFTH REPLY

Dear John B: I trust you had a wonderful Christmas and New Year holiday season with your family. Thank you for the nice card you sent. My sympathies are the same as those you expressed.

* We agree that Jesus and the apostles used the Septuagint translation in their teaching. When we talk of the inspired text of the Bible we do not have in mind any of the various translations done by men. All translations are the production of uninspired, hence imperfect, scholars. Some are more accurate and thus more valuable than others. It is the original documents from the hands of the inspired authors that were inspired of the Holy Spirit. The task of textual criticism is to identify and recover the words of those earliest documents. The Hebrew, being oldest and more meticulously done, is given preference over the Septuagint. In those places where the text of the Septuagint differs greatly from the Hebrew text (Jeremiah for example) to which would you give preference?

* I have copies of the Apocryphal books, introductions, surveys and commentaries on them. They provide interesting and helpful historical information but are not needed for our faith and obedience to Christ.

* Just as the New Testament books evolved over a period of some 50 years and were gradually assembled as recognized books from God, so the Old Testament came to be. The books that were questioned by some Jewish rabbis were inspired from the day they were written. That some or all men do not recognize them, does not in any way take away from their inspiration and authority. Yes, churches in the early years depended on the Greek translation of the Old Testament as few Gentiles would have been able to read the Hebrew Old Testament. The decision to reject the Apocryphal books as part of the inspired text was based on far more than anti-catholic prejudice. It was based on the increased knowledge about the ancient manuscripts and their history. Does not your church classify them as Deutero-canonical?

* Your conclusions about Paul praying for a deceased brother (II Tim. 1:16-18) assume more than the text warrants. Onesiphorus had served the church in Ephesus well. He had gone to Rome to minister to Paul who was under arrest. Paul expresses the wish that his house (family) was be granted mercy of the Lord and that the Lord would grant mercy

unto Onesiphorus himself. If the mention of the brother implies he was dead, would it not imply the same with regard to his family? At best we can only speculate on the condition of the brother. Perhaps he was also imprisoned and awaiting trial. If so, Paul prays that he might be released. If by chance he were already dead, Paul's words do not necessarily constitute a petition such as you would offer for one in purgatory. When our loved ones die, we often express the fervent wish that they will rest in peace, yet among our people no one would think of this as a prayer for the dead such as you have. In literary terms we would describe this as a pious wish for his friend.

* The verse you cite about our suffering (Col. 1:24) speaks of Paul's sufferings as he pursued his great mission. It says nothing about suffering in purgatory following death. Remember you cannot find mention of purgatory in your Bible. It is the invention of men. Yes, suffering does refine and purify us. All living souls will eventually experience some degree of physical or mental pain and suffering. But that says nothing about the dead. In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, when righteous Lazarus died, the angels carried him away to Abraham's bosom. The Rich Man immediately found himself in torment. The great gulf separated them and none could cross over (Luke 19-31).

* I Corinthians 13 is part of Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts including speaking in tongues (foreign languages one has not studied or learned) and the gift of prophecy, (the ability to preach by divine guidance) (I Cor. 14:3). In chapter 12 he lists the various gifts. In 13 he deals with an ugly problem that had arisen. There was unholy competition between those who had the gift of tongues and those with the gift of prophecy. Each thought his was the superior gift. This was causing disruption in the body. In chapter 14 he spells out regulations about how these gifts should be used. In chapter 13 he rebukes both of them by pointing out that without brotherly love, their gifts were nothing. He concludes by saying that prophecy, tongues and supernatural knowledge would all be terminated, but love would last. Verse 10 gives the time when that would occur. When that perfect (thing, neuter gender) comes, the miraculous gifts would cease. It is interesting that by the end of the first century the miraculous gifts were rapidly disappearing and soon were no longer evident. Counterfeit miracle workers still claimed such power (and still do) but the miracles the Apostles were enabled to do had ceased with the completion of the perfect revelation. The purpose of the miracles was to reveal and confirm the message of the apostles (John 16:13; Mark 16:20).

* When contemplating the works of God we need to remember that he works on three levels. Natural laws were designed and implemented by him. Thus the seasons, the movement of the heavenly bodies and a thousand other things occur in a most beneficial way because our benevolent God made them for our benefit. Thus the farmer plants his crop and the sun and the rain bless it and ere long he has a harvest. He also works providentially. That is, he sometimes intervenes in the natural course of affairs to bless his children or to punish the wicked but in so doing he uses the forces of nature to do this. He can send drought or flood on a specific place. He can cause a storm to be destructive to man, or he might turn it back to the sea where no one is harmed. Thus he answers the prayers of his people. He aids the surgeon to restore an injured body. He protects a person in the midst of disaster and destruction. While the action is remarkable it is not a miracle like opening the Red Sea or walking on water. On some occasions in history God has acted in supernatural ways, such as in the Creation and in the flood of Noah's day. At other times he has given to men the power to work mighty signs and wonders. This gift was not for their own glory or honor, rather it was to confirm to their hearers that they were indeed sent from God with a message that must be heeded (Mark. 16:19-20). Miracles of this kind are not seen today. As Paul promised they have ceased.

* You say that your church respects the authority of the Bible, but in this is hardly the case. The Bible stands in fourth place to your living voice the councils and the traditions that have evolved over 1500 years. If the leaders of your church should one day resolve to discard every thing not clearly taught in the Bible you would be amazed at what would be left afterwards.

* As I have said before, I have the writings of the church fathers. I have numerous books that introduce, survey and discuss their meaning and their credibility. I have done some reading in them. That they hold some view that is contrary to what I read in the Bible is proof of their fallible nature. Some things in their pages are curiosities, some are of historical value, some show signs of the influence of Greek philosophical thought. Some of them reflect good insight into the life and faith of the early church. I offer this illustration. If I could present to you 20 or even 200 men from as many nations of the world who confidently affirm that they have seen an animal with a human head. You would not be inclined to give credence to their testimony. They may well be sincere in their belief. They may well have no dishonorable motive, yet they are wrong and we dismiss their testimony. So do we in those places where the early

Christian writers express views that are either without biblical basis or even contrary to it.

* As to such cherished practices as your Christmas and Easter celebrations, I remind you that we truly believe the facts of Jesus' birth as revealed in the Bible. We recognize the value and importance of these things. So also with the resurrection of Christ and the implications of it in the life of the Christian and the church. But we much prefer to say we believe and practice as we do because that is what Jesus and his delegated apostles did and taught us to do than to say this was instituted by some man hundreds of years later.

May God grant you and your dear family a happy, healthy and prosperous New Year. May your studies of God's Word bring you both satisfaction and reward.

Sincerely, John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-SIXTH LETTER

Greetings! I hope you have been well. My work got quite busy after New Year's, but I am happy to be able to resume our dialogue.

As you know, I like to see the glass as half full, and I think there are one or two more points we can agree on, although we have different nuances to these beliefs. John, one of my goals in this dialogue has been to show you that Catholics are indeed Christians (I would say the fullest type of Christians). While we differ on many things, I have tried to show you what the Catholic Church teaches and how these beliefs are more in line with the early Church than you might think. I cannot change your mind, but I only present the reasoning and the logic behind the faith.

* It seems that most of these things we discuss boil down to a question of authority. I too think that the Bible is an authority, but only in conjunction with the visible Church Jesus founded. You mistakenly try to pit the Church's living voice in opposition to the Bible. (I don't know where you get the idea of "fourth place." The Church Councils have never contradicted the Bible.) I see authority as a three-legged stool: the Bible, the Tradition of the Church (see 2 Thess. 2:15), and the living voice of the Church, the bishops (see Luke 10:16). None of these can contradict the other, otherwise the stool wobbles and falls (i.e., splits into thousands of different denominations). The doctrine of sola scriptura is merely 500 years old, and frankly, is based on a refusal to submit personal will to a higher authority. I know you would say that the Bible is your higher authority, but remember how we agreed that many passages can be interpreted quite differently? (See 2 Peter 3:16 and Acts 8:30-31.) Thus your own interpretation becomes the authority. Plus, nowhere in the Bible does it say that it is the only authority, so this notion itself doesn't make sense! I think in the past you referred to II Tim. 3:16 (all scripture is inspired and profitable for instruction, etc.) but that does not say that the NT (which didn't exist yet) is the only authority, nor does it say which books make up the Scriptures. You then stated that we didn't need any bishops to tell us which books were to be in the NT, since it was obvious -- much like the cream naturally rising to the top. This too is fallacious, because you surely recall that there was quite a bit of disagreement about the canon (Hebrews, Revelation, and others were hotly debated). So someone -- a living, breathing person or group of persons -- had to say: Yes, we will be using this list of books.

* Continuing the sola scriptura analysis: I hope we can both admit that we read the Bible through our own "glasses." That's OK -- we can't read Scripture in a vacuum -- but the next question is to examine where these goggles came from. Your glasses are homemade; based on your own feeling of the Holy Spirit, and girded by the Reformation's concept of sola scriptura. My glasses are handed on to me by two thousand years of Christian reflection and teaching. It is not a case of submitting blindly, but of considering the voice of authority that gave us the Bible and continues to see it protected and interpreted correctly.

* Here is an example: You have a preconceived notion that it is impossible for us to ask saints in heaven to pray for us. In the past, you presented 1 Tim. 2:5 as proof of this -- "there is but one mediator between God and men." But this is reading Scripture through your own goggles, because you fail to see that your interpretation of this verse also means that

those of us on Earth cannot pray for each other. (Imagine saying: "Sorry, my daughter! I can't pray for your illness; you must go directly to Jesus!") So isn't it true that the correct interpretation of this verse must be one that allows for intercessory prayer? Thus, the verse is irrelevant to the question of departed saints praying for us.

* You also have stated a denial of the doctrine of original sin. I rejoice that we both see baptism as regenerative -- not symbolic, as some Protestants do -- but we differ in that you see it washing away only personal sin. I would say it washes away personal and original sin. I do understand your logic: a baby obviously has no personal sin. But one only needs to read a newspaper to see the effects of original sin! Where does man get this awful tendency to hurt God and neighbor? Was it not handed down to us from Adam? (see I Cor. 15:21-22). If you deny original sin, then how does this tendency get transmitted to us? Christian teaching has always been that it is through the *flesh*. We inherit Adam's original sin. If you deny original sin, then you are saying that we are each our own "Adam," without linkage to the original Adam's sin. So original sin is washed away in baptism, but the concupiscence (tendency to sin) remains. Great thinkers over the centuries have pondered your idea, and realized that it doesn't fit into Scripture or the theology of salvation. God saved us by the flesh, because through the flesh man had fallen. If there were no original sin, then we could just express our sorrow to God, and He would grant forgiveness for each person. Instead, he used the flesh (Jesus, the new Adam) to redeem us. We only have to accept this gift to complete the saving process.

* Back to a few items from your prior email... I'm not sure that I follow your explanation of the OT canon. I understand what you say about the original languages (Catholics also say that translations can be faulty). But in your third "asterisk" you seem to acknowledge that the Christian Bible in the first millennium contained these extra books, and then upon researching the translations, Christians realized they weren't supposed to be there. So we finally straightened out the error in the 1500s. If this is what you're saying, then it only weakens your sola scriptura position! How can we trust today's Bible? Perhaps the canon will get tweaked again! And who is the authority to decide such in the future?

* Yes, Catholics use the term Deutero-canonical. It doesn't mean we see them as second-tier. But it is a way to speak of different groups of books (the Torah or Pentateuch, the Historical books, the Prophetic books, etc.).

* You now seem to admit that we can pray for the dead, but only in the sense that we wish them well in the afterlife. But isn't your belief that at the instant of death, one is immediately sent to heaven or hell? Why pray for them to rest in peace? I believe that we are judged immediately, and may go directly up or down, but many people have to make a "stopover" to be perfected still before entering heaven. Thus, a prayer for the deceased is worthy, not to cause their salvation -- they have no second chance at that -- but to speed them along to heaven.

* Also regarding purgatory, you said, "Remember you cannot find mention of purgatory in your Bible." But the notion of "Bible only" is a man-made invention, as I showed above. As a Catholic Christian, I try to follow what Jesus said and did. And John 21:25 tells us that "there are many other things that Jesus did, but if these were to be described individually, I do not think the whole world would contain the books that would be written." Clearly, then, not everything must be stated explicitly in Scripture. But purgatory can be derived from many passages: Rev. 21:27 and Matt. 5:48, for example. And especially see 1 Corinth 3:13-15, where Paul says that in the afterlife, we may be saved, but through fire.

* I still think there is a gray area between saying that miracles have ceased, and saying that God continues to do miracles through nature. Using the three-tiered model, do you believe only the first two tiers still apply? (Those were natural laws -- seasons of the year -- and natural instruments -- surgeons, floods, etc.) I don't think we can dismiss that third tier altogether. While we can never place our faith in people to heal supernaturally, there are indeed some Christians who are blessed with a healing gift. They do not perform the miracle, God does. There are also angels that can be sent by God to save us from calamity (yes, each of us has a guardian angel). But you can't say that miracles which defy nature cannot occur in our times. This was one of the great errors of the Enlightenment.

* Finally, regarding the Church fathers. As you pointed out, they are not infallible writings, but they are worthy for study into how the early Christians believed and practiced their faith. Yes, if they say something contrary to the Bible, then they are just plain wrong. You present the example of 200 people who claim to have seen a beast with a human head. Yes, we know this is not God's design, so we can probably dismiss it. But take something like the Eucharist. Is it outside of God's design? No, Jesus Himself says the words that transform the bread and wine. The early fathers all spoke of

Communion as the body and blood of Christ. So the fathers are only confirming a perfectly plausible reading of John 6. Every single mention speaks of it either as a sacrifice, or body and blood, or they explicitly say that it is no longer bread and wine. If you could present one writing in the first 1400 years after Christ showing that Christians saw the Eucharist as only symbolic, then your reading of John 6 might have more weight. But your preconceived notions about the Eucharist prevent you from agreeing with the fathers, even when the Bible, the early Christians, and the constant teaching of the Church are clear about this.

Well, that's all for now. I wish you a peaceful weekend and look forward to your next email!

In Christ, John Belanger

JOHN WADDEY'S TWENTY-SIXTH REPLY

Dear Friend John B: Please forgive my tardiness in replying as I have been overwhelmed with work and other demands on my time and attention.

* When you read Jesus' words as he instituted the Communion, you insist they must be interpreted literally;" "This is my body, This is my blood." Your church has built an elaborate ritual and doctrinal on that literal interpretation. Now Jesus also said, "I am the true vine" (John 15:1). Do you also interpret this literally? If not why? He also says, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). Do you interpret this literally? If not why? When you partake of the elements of the communion, your eyes tell you it is bread and wine. Your taste buds do the same. A chemical analysis would do the same. In the face of these realities you insist it is in some way the real flesh and blood of Jesus. It is a matter of believing against the facts a doctrine that has evolved within your church over many centuries. Although some speculated about the possibility of the real presence, it was the Lateran Council of 1215 that defined transubstantiation as a matter of faith. It was refined and reaffirmed by the Council of Trent. I find that "African divines, Tertullian, Cyprian and Augustine teach a symbolical and spiritual presence; and the Alexandrian school of Clement and Origen put the whole design of the Eucharist in feeding the soul on the spiritual life and the divine word of Christ. Hence the Fathers have been appealed to for the Lutheran, Calvinistic and Zwinglian theory, as well as for the Roman Catholic" (**Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge** (Vol. XI, page 500-501)

* Other thoughts come to mind that surely you must have considered. When your priest has consecrated the elements and allegedly turned them into the body and blood of Jesus, what would happen should some of the elements not be consumed? Just how long would the bread remain the flesh of Jesus if the remaining portion were stored away, or inadvertently not eaten? On another plane that I hesitate to broach, have your theologians pondered the result of a human being consuming the flesh and blood of Jesus. There of course is the embarrassing question of cannibalism. But there is the matter of the flesh of Jesus entering the stomach, mixing with gastric juices and passing on into the lower gastric tract of man and eventually eliminated. This unpleasant thought must be considered if the bread and wine are the real flesh and blood of Jesus rather than a symbolic memorial to remind us of his suffering on the cross.

* The early Christian writers stand in the same relation to the Bible and the church as a godfearing Christian Scholar of our day. Their writings are of interest for many reasons. They have historic value. They reveal the thinking of early Christians. They are useful for comparative studies. But they are human, uninspired men, who have no divine authority. All were flawed to one extent or the other. Some were influenced by Greek philosophy. Some were speculative in their interpretations. They did not all agree with each other. So we do in fact consider what they said, and then weigh their thoughts by the God-given words of the inspired books....our New Testament.

* As to purgatory. When a person first assumes his belief on a given "religious" subject he can then go to the Bible and find a suitable number of words, phrases or verses that he can use to justify his foregone conclusions. If he happens to be correct (i.e. in harmony with) the Bible's teaching, he finds truth to substantiate his presupposition. But if he chances to be wrong, he will need to wrest the scriptures he cites to make his case (II Pet. 3:16). This you do to justify you notion of purgatory, prayers for the dead, prayers to the saints, etc. Your attempt to derive purgatory from passages that

do not mention it reminds me of the Supreme Court jurist, I think it was Justice Blackman, who was able to find a woman's right to abortion in the adumbrations of the right to privacy. The wish was father to the finding. Neither Matt. 5:48, I Cor. 3:13-15 or Rev. 21:27 are talking about a place or experience called purgatory. No person reading those for the first time, with no prior knowledge of your doctrine would reach that conclusion.

* I realize that miracles still play an important role in the practice of Catholicism. Healing shrines, healing priests and apparitions are a vital part of your system. While I believe, without reservation, that Jesus and his apostles could and did perform miraculous deeds, I do not believe that contemporary people of Catholic or Pentecostal churches perform the same kind of works. You do not have a single Catholic in the world who can walk on water, who can turn water to wine or feed 5,000 with a boy's sack lunch. You have no one who can raise the dead after four days when the body is decaying. Whatever is done that some proclaim to be miraculous is of a different sort and kind. Psychosomatic illnesses can be cured by the power of suggestion. But you cannot reattach a severed ear with a touch. Can you?

* You repeatedly declare your belief in the Bible and its authority but then in the next breath you deny that it is what God made it to be. You can site a dozen ways to prove that we cannot be sure about the books of the Bible, that the early Christians did not have the New Testament writings, that other books of doubtful origin are of equal value. You say the average man cannot hope to read and understand the Bible without the authoritative explanation of your pope. When a passage is presented that is contrary to your church's official position you turn to tradition and the living voice to override it. It seems that even though Pope John XXIII and Vatican II finally gave Catholics the right to own and read the Bible, the basic approach has not changed. Rather than search the Scriptures to determine God's will, just ask the priest, because you cannot hope to understand the Bible without the official voice of the church to guide you. What can people do who have no Catholic priest to interpret the Bible for them? They learn to read, they study the Scriptures, but they have no priest to tell them what to believe! What did Christians do in the second through the sixth centuries when there was not yet a universal head of the church to be consulted?

* In responding to my objections for praying for the dead you say, well then we cannot pray for each other here on earth. But we have scripture precedence for that. Paul urges the Ephesian Christians, "with all prayer and supplication, praying at all seasons...and supplication for all the saints, and on my behalf" (Eph. 6:18-19). The writer of Hebrews says, "it is appointed unto men once to die; and after this cometh judgment" (9:27). We will be judged as we are when we die. If I die a faithful Christian, I will receive the faithful Christian's reward. If I die a lost sinner, that will be my reward in eternity. Ten thousand prayers will not make a difference in my destiny.

* As to your statement that sola scriptura is only 500 years old, I concede the phrase might be said to have originated in the revolt against Catholicism, but the concept derives from the earliest days of the church.

Irenaeus says it quite well. "We have learned from none others the plan of our salvation, than from those through whom the gospel has come down to us, which they did at one time proclaim in public, and, at a later period, by the will of God, handed down to us in the Scriptures, to be the ground and pillar of our faith." Alexander Roberts and James Donaldson, editors, **Ante-Nicene Fathers** (Peabody: Hendriksen, 1995) Vol. 1, Irenaeus, "Against Heresies" 3.1.1, p. 414.

Cyril of Jerusalem writes "This seal have thou ever on thy mind; which now by way of summary has been touched on in its heads, and if the Lord grant, shall hereafter be set forth according to our power, with Scripture proofs. For concerning the divine and sacred Mysteries of the Faith, we ought not to deliver even the most casual remark without the Holy Scriptures: nor be drawn aside by mere probabilities and the artifices of argument. Do not then believe me because I tell thee these things, unless thou receive from the Holy Scriptures the proof of what is set forth: for this salvation, which is of our faith, is not by ingenious reasonings, but by proof from the Holy Scriptures." **A Library of the Fathers of the Holy Catholic Church** (Oxford: Parker, 1845), "The Catechetical Lectures of S. Cyril" Lecture 4.17).

Gregory of Nyssa says "...we make the Holy Scriptures the rule and the measure of every tenet; we necessarily fix our eyes upon that, and approve that alone which may be made to harmonize with the intention of those writings." (Ibid., Lecture 5.12).

Irenaeus: lived from c 130 to 202 AD. He quotes from twenty-four of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, taking over 1,800 quotations from the New Testament alone. **Clement of Alexandria**: lived from 150 to 215 AD. He

cites all the New Testament, books except Philemon, James and 2 Peter. He gives 2,400 citations from the New Testament. Tertullian: lived from 160 to 220 AD. He makes over 7,200 New Testament citations. Origen: lived from 185 to 254 AD. He succeeded Clement of Alexandria at the Catechetical school at Alexandria. He makes nearly 18,000 New Testament citations. By the end of the 3rd century, virtually the entire New Testament could be reconstructed from the writings of the Church Fathers. These early Christians had the New Testament books in hand, they viewed them as authoritative and the sacred standard. They did their work before and without a papacy or the accumulated traditions of your church.

* You really cannot gain credence for the traditions of your Catholic church by citing Paul's statement, "hold the traditions which ye were taught whether by word, or by epistle of ours" (II Thess. 2:15). Paul was chosen by Christ and guided by the Holy Spirit. He uses the term to refer to his teachings which he had given the church in Thessalonica, certainly not to traditions of uninspired men who lived hundreds of years later....many of which conflict with the clear teachings of the apostles. I find it remarkable that you would consider equating the teachings of popes (uninspired men) many of whom were wicked men, with the words of the apostles and prophets who were godly men guided by the Spirit of the Living God (I Cor. 13).

* I still deny the existence of such a thing as original sin. I believe in sin which is transgressions of God's law (I John 3:4) and failure to do what we now we should do (Jas. 4:17). I rest my case with Ezek. 18:20 which clearly says, "The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father..." Whom should I believe, the inspired prophet or the uninspired traditions of Rome.

* While we certainly believe that baptism is the appointed time and place where God remits our sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16) we do not see that as baptismal regeneration. Christ is our Savior (Tit. 3:13). His blood, shed in his death on the cross, cleanses us from all our sins (I John 1:7). Our salvation is a gift of God's grace but the gift is conditioned on our willingness to demonstrate our faith by obeying Christ's command to be immersed (Mark 16:16; Heb. 5:9).

Have a good day and continue to search the Scriptures. John Waddey

JOHN BELANGER'S TWENTY-SEVENTH LETTER

Hello John: As usual, I thank you for your thoughtful reply and your questions about the Eucharist.

* Throughout the centuries Catholics have been posed the very questions you have asked about the "real presence" of Jesus under the appearance of bread. First, however, I need to point out that the early Church clearly taught that the bread and wine are transformed. (You say that it was merely "speculated" upon.) In earlier emails I have shown how the Church Councils have often formally defined things only when they were seriously questioned. One example is the Biblical canon, which was formally spelled out at the Council of Trent. But any Bible from the preceding one thousand years would have had the same canon, because it was not questioned! Also, I would say that the quote you offer from the Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia is not wrong; the Eucharist does indeed feed the spiritual life. I don't rely on it as my physical food! But still, it is truly Jesus. You may already know that Luther believed in a variation of transubstantiation -- called consubstantiation -- that is not quite correct but still vastly different than the views of all other Protestants.

* An important part of the Christian life is an acceptance of "mystery." I see, smell, and taste the host as bread, just as you would. But ontologically it is not bread; I know this by faith. Just because I don't comprehend something doesn't mean it's not true. St. Augustine tells of a time when he was walking on the beach, and came upon a small boy with a bucket and shovel. The lad was digging a hole in the sand, and pouring water into it. Augustine asked what he was doing. The reply was, "I'm going to put the entire sea into this hole!" Augustine pointed out that this was impossible. But the boy said to him, "I will be able to do this before you will ever understand the Trinity." The boy then disappeared before his eyes. So just as the Trinity is a mystery, so is the idea of Jesus in the Eucharist.

* Don't you find it ironic that you have insisted upon a literal interpretation of many Bible verses, but those about the

Eucharist as body and blood you insist as being figurative? One example was "Call no man father," which you proposed as proof of another Catholic "error" about calling priests Father. (If that were so, then other Bible verses are themselves in error -- see I Cor. 4:14-15, I John 2:13-14, and Acts 7:2, among others). But when Jesus explicitly says "my flesh is real food" you insist on the opposite: the literal interpretation cannot be correct. This is again the danger of holding oneself as the authoritative interpreter of Scripture.

But back to your specific queries. Yes, Jesus also said "I am the vine" and "I am the door of the sheep." In fact, literary devices were quite common in his culture. He often used hyperbole: "If your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out" (Mark 9:47) which we had better not take literally! Yet there are several things that make the Eucharistic teaching ring true:

1 -- In John 6, Jesus very explicitly says that His body and blood are true food and drink, and that those who do not eat it have no life within them. Subsequently, many followers walk away. Did Jesus stop them, and clarify that they were misinterpreting him? No. It is the only recorded instance where followers left Him for doctrinal reasons.

2 -- In the past, you have said that the original languages are the true Scriptures. So let's use this when looking at chapter 6 of John. In verse 57, the Greek word used for "eat" of the flesh of Jesus is "trogon," which actually has the better translation of "to chew" or "to gnaw." This is not the terminology of a figurative saying!

3 -- The phrase "to eat the flesh and drink the blood," when used figuratively among the Jews of Jesus's time, meant to inflict upon a person some serious injury, especially by calumny or by false accusation. "To interpret the phrase figuratively would be to make our Lord promise life everlasting to the culprit for slandering and hating him, which would reduce the whole passage to utter nonsense" (John O'Brien, *The Faith of Millions*, pg. 215).

4 -- You have previously offered John 6:63 as a supposed explanation. But would Jesus really give a lengthy exhortation and then say "the flesh avails nothing"? Since he *did* say that, it must have an interpretation that fits the context -- it just wouldn't make sense to do all this talking about His flesh and then renounce it with that simple phrase. (I presume we both agree that Christ's flesh avails much!) Instead, Jesus was referring to man's tendency to think using only natural human reason, rather than what is revealed by God.

5 -- Early Christian writings (many of the same writers that you quoted about the authority of Scripture) have stated that it is explicitly NOT symbolic. See my earlier emails with quotations from Cyril of Jerusalem, Ignatius of Antioch, and Justin the Martyr. Their explanation of Communion is quite in agreement with John 6.

So, with all due respect, I would claim that you are doing extensive gymnastics to try and get around the traditional Christian interpretation of the Eucharistic presence.

* As to the more practical aspects of eating a transformed host -- Yes, there are usually hosts left over after the liturgy. And just as the early Church did, we save these hosts in a special place called the tabernacle. (I believe it was Justin Martyr who described the saving of Communion for later distribution to the sick who could not be there.) Any extra "wine" is consumed rather than saved. Neither of the Communion elements are simply tossed in the sink or trash after they've been consecrated.

The presence of Jesus remains as long as the appearances of bread or wine remains. And as for the biological functions, don't feel bad about bringing it up! Jesus said He will be our food, and food is meant to be eaten. Some Catholics are so timid about consuming the host, even keeping it in their mouth without chewing, and when it softens up enough, they carefully swallow it. This is nonsense -- it's OK to chew it just like any other food. (Although we shouldn't be crass, or pick our teeth with a toothpick.) The stomach will digest it just as it would bread. All of this goes back to the difference between an object's substance and its physical appearances. Non-Catholics rely on physical appearances as the sole rule of faith.

* The charge of cannibalism is nothing new to Christians -- the early Romans said this (at a time prior to the supposed "invention" of the concept of transubstantiation). First, realize that the Communion host is the sacramental presence of Christ. It is not a dead body of bones and meat. We are partaking of the living body of Christ. Second, there are three planes of existence: Physical, symbolic, and sacramental. The presence of Jesus is a case of the latter. We are not

destroying His physical body, which is what cannibalism is.

* Finally, on to a different topic -- I surely didn't mean to misrepresent your views of baptism. But you had mentioned how baptism is required for a Christian, so I presumed that you view it as more than just symbolic. And I agree with you that Christ's blood cleanses us from our sins, however, this cleansing has to be applied to each person. This is what baptism is -- it "regenerates" one as a new person in Christ (this is "born again"). That's why I used the term regenerative. Either baptism creates a person anew or it doesn't.

Well, I spent so much time explaining the Catholic Eucharist -- I won't bite off any more for today. I am not trying to skirt the other topics (purgatory, sola scriptura, miracles, and praying to saints) but I promise to address them in my next letter.

May the Lord bless both of us as we continue to discern His truth, John-Paul Belanger

NOTE AND CONCLUSION

At this point the correspondence ended. Regretfully, Mr. Waddey's schedule and duties were such that he was unable to continue the discussion with Mr. Belanger.

It is hoped that all who read these letters will benefit from them, whether Catholic or not. Mr. Belanger knows the faith and practice of the Church of Rome and proved himself capable of giving a good presentation of her principles. Mr. Waddey explained why Bible-believing Christians reject her claims and those doctrines peculiar to her, citing Scripture and appropriate references to make his points.

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