

“Catholics, Come Home”

The Catholic Church boasts of a membership of over one billion people. With a membership that large there are bound to be numerous “ex Catholics, and countless people who have simply drifted away, no longer being a part of that religious body. At heart, many of them profess to be “Catholic,” but they have long since ceased attending any of its worship services or participating in any of the programs and activities of that Church. Consequently, we should not be surprised to learn that among Catholics there is a strong effort to reach out to such people and to urge them to “**come home.**” Though I only recall viewing “**Catholics Come Home**” for the first time in recent weeks, research reveals that the “Catholics Come Home” approach has been under way since 1998.

I do not for a moment question the sincerity of those who are involved in putting on the “**Catholics Come Home**” appeals. To their credit, the ones involved seem sincere, and their ads are well done. If I were a biblically uninformed ex Catholic who had simply drifted away, I confess that I would probably be impressed, and might well be inclined to “come home” from the perspective of returning to the Catholic Church and participating in its many programs, both of a religious and social nature. However, I must also frankly state that I personally do not profess to be either “Catholic” or “Protestant.” To the contrary, I claim to be simply a “*Christian*,” Acts 11:26, a member of the church Jesus built, Matthew 16:18, which was purchased with His blood, Acts 20:28, which came into existence on the first “*Pentecost*” following our Lord’s ascension into heaven, Acts 2:1,47, and whose marks of identity are clearly outlined upon the pages of the New Testament.

Notwithstanding the fact that I simply claim to be a Christian and a member of the church described in the New Testament, I, too, am inclined to urge Catholics to “**come home!**” Please do not misunderstand! I am not appealing to ex-Catholics to return to Catholicism, but I do appeal to them to “**come home.**” Have I succeeded in getting you confused? Let me explain. The word “home” has a number of definitions, and it may be used in both a literal and a metaphorical sense. In this article I am using “home” to refer to one’s point of origin. Specifically, I urge Catholics to come back to that from which Catholicism originated. Quite frankly, I kindly state that there are very few similarities between the Catholic Church of today and the church about which one can read upon the pages of the New Testament. Simply put, I affirm that Jesus did not build the Catholic Church of today, but that the Catholic Church of today, over a period of hundreds of years, evolved from what Jesus built. In urging Catholics to “**come home**” I am therefore urging them to come back to that from which Catholicism evolved!

Please let me be more specific. To the elders, or bishops, of the church at Ephesus the apostle Paul exhorted, saying, “*shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His Own blood,*” Acts 20:28. Then he warned them, saying that “*from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves,*” Acts 20:30. Elsewhere we discover that “*elders,*” or “*bishops,*” were appointed in “*every church,*” Acts 14:23, and that Peter, by inspiration, exhorted “*the elders*” to “*shepherd the flock of God which is*

among you...,” I Peter 5:1,2. You see, in New Testament days the plan was that there be a plurality of elders, or bishops, overseeing or shepherding local churches, each congregation being independent or autonomous. Each eldership consisted of a plurality of men, none of them having greater authority than any of the others. Never do we read of anyone serving as “**the** bishop,” nor do we ever read of one eldership having oversight over a plurality of local churches. However, it is a historical fact that many local churches digressed as time progressed. Consequently, in the course of time, changes began to be made in the organization of the church, with one elder emerging as “**The** bishop” over the other elders, and even “the bishop” over the whole church! It continued to evolve until there was the specter of different ones serving as “**the** bishop” over a diocese! Ultimately, as centuries unfolded, there were five major dioceses — located at Jerusalem, Antioch, Constantinople, Alexandria, and Rome. Finally, in 588 A.D., John the Faster, “The Bishop” (also called “Patriarch) of Constantinople, assumed the title of “universal Bishop of the Church,” This was bitterly contested by “the Bishop” at Rome. Ultimately, in 606 A.D. the Roman Emperor took that title from John the Faster and conferred it upon Boniface III, “the Bishop” at Rome. Thus, over a period of nearly 600 years things evolved to the point of having a Pope, a “universal bishop,” a “Vicar of Christ” on earth, and over all the churches. In point of origin the Papacy is not something the Lord ordained; rather it originated from a local church elder who got “too big for his britches!”

First century Christians should have foreseen the apostasy which eventually culminated in Catholicism. In addition to the passages already cited, we also mention I Timothy 4:1-3, wherein the apostle Paul warned that “*in latter times some would depart from the faith,*” even stating that such would involve “*forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats...*” In the second chapter of second Thessalonians the same apostle referred to “*the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ,*” and then stated that “*that Day will not come unless the **falling away** comes first, and the man of sin is revealed,*” verses 1-3. He further described “*the man of sin*” as one who “*opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God,*” v. 4 — language which is mighty descriptive of one who would consent to be called “Pope,” “The Vicar of Christ,” be carried about in a “Pope mobile,” allow thousands to bow before him, kiss his ring, and receive the honor which ought to be ascribed only to God!

Not only were there changes in organization, as time progressed there were countless other innovations as well — such as The Invocation of Saints, praying to Mary, sprinkling for baptism, instrumental music in worship, image and relic worship, holy water, Purgatory, Latin Mass, Extreme Unction, Transubstantiation, Indulgences, Auricular Confession, etc, etc. If Catholics really “come home” — that is if they come all the way back to that from which Catholicism itself evolved, then these are some of the things which they will have to give up.

Notwithstanding the things we have just mentioned, multitudes believe the Lord established the Catholic Church, and they even say “the Bible is a Catholic Book!” Regarding this point, I ask, “**if** the Bible really is a Catholic Book, then **why**? **Why** does it teach against the adoration of Mary, Matthew 12:47-50? **Why** does it teach that all Christians are priests, I Peter 2:5,9? **Why** does it forbid us to call religious leaders “*father*,” Matthew 23:9? **Why** does it teach that a bishop must be married, I Timothy 3:2,4,5? **Why** does it teach that baptism involves immersion instead of sprinkling or pouring, Romans 6:3,4; Acts 8:36-38? **Why** does it condemn the religious observance of special days, Galatians 4:9-11? **Why** does it teach that Christ, not Peter, is the only foundation of the church, I Corinthians 3:11?

Conclusion:

Many, many more “why” questions could be asked. “The bottom line” is this: one simply cannot discover a parallel between the identifying marks of the church which is described in the New Testament and the identifying marks of the Catholic Church as it exists today! Instead of the Catholic Church being the church Jesus built, the facts prove that it is an apostate religious body which has evolved from that which Jesus built. That being the case, then, with love and concern, I urge all Catholics to “come home” — **come** all the way back to the Bible and to the church so clearly outlined in the Bible! Those who “come home” through that process have a much better chance of *going* home (to heaven) in the life to come. —

Bobby Witherington