***The History of the Traditions of the Roman Catholic Church

RV16-01***

We turn to Revelation 2:18, which reads, "And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God who has His eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine bronze.'" We have thus far seen in our studies of the previous letters that there has been a strange and very fascinating coordination between what has happened in actual churches that existed in Asia Minor, to whom the apostle John was writing from the isle of Patmos, and the subsequent progression of church history.

The Ephesian letter indicated that the local church in that particular place had begun to lose its mental attitude quality of love, and it had lost its devotion to Christian service. Following that letter to the church in Ephesus came a letter to Smyrna. Smyrna was the church that was under persecution because of its stand for God's divine viewpoint, because they understood the social issues of their day, and they were against the religious establishment. The third letter went to the church at Pergamum. This was the church that compromised with Satan's World system. This was the church that represented an era in church history when believers had had enough of persecution, and they entered instead an accommodation with the world system. This came to a climax, of course, under the emperor Constantine, ruler of the Roman Empire, when Christianity was accepted as a state religion, and in time became the only authorized religion in the Roman Empire. That, of course, brought in thousands of unregenerate pagans. Along with the influx of these pagans came their religious system, which was the old Babylonian mystery cults and all that that connoted. These gradually infiltrated into the local church organizations, and became in time a part of what we know today as the Roman Catholic Church.

**The Angel**

We now begin the letter to Thyatira. The letter to Thyatira represents the era in church history when indeed the amalgamation between New Testament Christianity and Babylonian mystery cult paganism has reached its full fruition. It begins with the word "and" in verse 18 which is the Greek word "kai." That's a conjunction indicating that He is now going to begin dictating to John a new letter. He addresses this letter to what he calls the angel which is the Greek word "aggelos." "Aggelos" is the normal word for angel. The word itself means "messenger." Here it is referring to the pastor-teacher who is in charge of the church ministry in the city of Thyatira. So the "aggelos" here is equivalent to pastor-teacher.

**The Church**

This message is being delivered to the leader of the church. The word for "church" is that Greek word "ekklesia." "Ekklesia" is a combination of two Greek words. The first part "ek" means "out," and the latter part means "called." It comes from the verb "kaleo." So the word "church" represents "called-out ones." It is a called-out separated assembly from the mass of humanity. Here, of course, the word very fittingly represents the body of Christ, which is a distinctive, called-out group of saints from among all the people of God. Not everyone who is born again throughout history is part of the church. The church began on the day of Pentecost. It will end on the day of the rapture. Only the people who are in the era between Pentecost and the rapture constitute the church of Jesus Christ, and only they are going to be part of that unique relationship to Jesus Christ, related to Him as a bride is to her husband.

**Thyatira**

This word "church" in this place, of course, is the church at Thyatira. It is the church in the city of Thyatira. Therefore, it is referring to a local organization here. The word "Thyatira" is the Greek word "thuateira." The church at Thyatira was located in the city which was actually founded by Alexander the Great after the defeat of the Persian Empire. This city was located about 40 miles southeast of the previous city we studied in the previous letter to Pergamum. It was located in a rich agricultural area. It was not a very militarily defensible position, but it did play quite a part in military matters, because whoever was in charge of the military situation had to possess Thyatira in order to control the movements back and forth between critical areas. But the area itself was just a kind of a flat country without too much usable natural features for defense.

By the time that John is writing to this city, it has become quite a wealthy city. It is noted for its color dyes, particularly the purple dye – the color of royalty, and the color of nobility. It is also known for its manufacture of cloth. In the city of Thyatira, one could enter a clothing establishment, and you could buy clothes the way we can buy them today – off the rack, and ready-made.

**Guilds**

We find that this city is referred to many times in secular literature, and particularly to another feature that was outstandingly true of Thyatira. That is that they had trade guilds. This was outstandingly so in contrast to other ancient cities. For example, they had a wool workers guild; they had a linen workers guild; they had a makers of outer garments guild; they, of course, had a dyers guild, coloring cloth; they had a leather workers guild; they had a tanner's guild that prepared leather; they had a potters guild; they had a bakers guild; they had a slave dealers guild; and, they had a bronze smiths guild. These guilds were all protective agencies. They were like what we would call labor unions. One didn't function in these various trades in the city of Thyatira unless you belonged to one of these guilds. These guilds were often engaged in pagan worship, and this was frequently done in the form of gathering together as a union organization to have a meal in common. These meals were often dedicated in memory of some god, and very frequently they ended in some immoral orgy.

The city of Thyatira, however, was not a religious or a political center in the Roman Empire. It had few Jews in it, but it did have the normal run of ancient pagan religious systems. This city is only mentioned one other time in the New Testament. You might like to turn to that – a reference that you're all well acquainted with in Acts 16:14-15. The apostle Paul has just come over from Asia to Europe, to the city of Philippi, as a result of God's direction to him. He goes to a place at the riverside where a group of women were in the habit of gathering for prayer. Paul is looking for someplace to establish a beachhead to get a toehold for the gospel, and thus for a local church ministry. He begins here at the riverside with this ladies' study group.

Acts 16:14-15: "And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira, who worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul. When she was baptized, and her household, she besought us saying, 'If you judge me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house and abide there.' And she constrained us." Lydia was a citizen of the city of Thyatira. She was probably a member of one of these unions (one of these craft guilds), and certainly she was in the business, obviously, of the colored cloth business – dyeing cloth. She was in the business of what was called purple dye. But you mustn't think of this entirely in terms of the purple as we think of purple today. The ancients were notoriously sloppy about identifying colors distinctly. As a matter of fact, what they referred to here as purple, we would consider more a maroon – more on the red side. But in any case, it was a dye industry that she was engaged in.

Obviously, she was a businesswoman, and obviously, by her offer to entertain and to take care of Paul and his party of evangelists, she was also a lady of some financial means. She was part of this thriving cloth industry in Thyatira. She may have been, for all we know, the critical factor that God used in order to bring spiritual enlightenment into the city of Thyatira. We don't know how the gospel arrived there. We don't know how the church arose there. But perhaps she was used as the agent to bring the gospel back to that city, and was the one who began the enlightenment. If this is true, this is going to be rather interesting, because as you get into this letter, you're going to find very shortly that they've got another doll in the city of Thyatira who is really carrying on in a way that results in the most severe letter of all these seven to a church – a woman in spiritual influence, in great contrast to the kind of effect that Lydia would have had had she brought the gospel back to the city.

When we look about as to the reference of the era of the church, we've said that the church at Ephesus historically represented the apostolic era – when the apostles were still on the earth. The Christian community had begun. The church had begun. Everybody was hot and gungho for the message of salvation and the new doctrine of grace, which was now revealed in all of its fullness.

The church at Smyrna represented that era when the Roman Empire finally decided enough was enough, and they would no longer tolerate Christians telling the emperors that they were wrong; that certain things were evil; and, that they had an authoritative revelation from the living God, by which they could judge and condemn the very rulers of the empire. So persecution moved in upon the Christian community.

Following that, the letter to Pergamum represented the era when persecution was released. The pressure was taken off of Christians, and Christians rushed into making accommodations with the world. So the truth began to be compromised. We come to the era that runs from something like 600 A.D. to about 1520 A.D., the time of the Protestant Reformation. Historically, your history books call this period of time the Dark Ages, or perhaps the Middle Ages. This is the time when enlightenment of all kinds was practically dead; when learning was gone; and, when religion took on the most degrading forms of expression and the most paganistic types of concepts. Superstition and fear were brooded over by a supreme controlling church, the Roman Catholic Church – a church which had now become an amalgamation of all the precious doctrines of New Testament Christianity that you and I hold to, and the incorporation of all the paganistic concepts of the Babylonian mystery cults. This was a nightmare, and indeed it was a dark period in human history. A blanket of ignorance of every kind descended upon the human race, and it existed for just about 1,000 years. That is hard to believe. It is very hard to conceive of humanity going for 1,000 years in abject ignorance on every subject imaginable.

It was not until the Reformation, and consequently, the outburst of the Renaissance, that there was a revival of man using his mind to learn what the God that he knew was out there had created about him in an orderly fashion, that modern science was born. Man began again to express the marvelous quality – that thing, which in him is closer perhaps to God than anything else: his creativeness. So the great artistic expressions began to evolve once more of every kind – man reflecting the creative quality of God, and reflecting the image and likeness of God in this respect, that it was in himself his ability to be creative.

**Roman Catholic Church Traditions**

You will remember, perhaps, that the conditions that we are describing here in this terrible era of darkness actually began in the Pergamum church. Just to review for you very quickly, in the year 300 A.D., the system which we now know as the Roman Catholic Church began the custom of praying for the dead.

**The Sign of the Cross**

Also, in the year 300 A.D., the making of the sign of the cross as a magical act was inaugurated and authorized by the church. To make the sign of the cross was to gain merit for yourself with God. In 375, the worship of saints and angels was begun. This worship, however, was described by the word "veneration." But in practical effect, the Roman Catholic is acting in the same way toward these saints as he does to God. It's an act of worship. In 394, they pulled over from the Babylonian system the worship service that's centered around the mass.

**The Worship of Mary**

In 431, the worship of Mary was formalized. Again, they called it adoration (or veneration) of the Virgin Mary. But she was placed in a capacity of great power over the lives of people. In the year 500, the priests assumed clerical garb. They began dressing in a way that distinguished them from other people. In 526, the practice of extreme unction was inaugurated. In 593 A.D, the doctrine of purgatory was introduced.

Then we get to the year 600, which is really our dividing line now here with this new era that we're talking about. Here they formally declared that all worship services must be in Latin, and Latin alone. In the year 600, another heresy was instituted, and that was praying to the Virgin Mary. Prayers were directed to Mary for the basic concept that she has a favored position with her Son. All of this was done in the Pergamum era.

**The Pope**

But the church went right on. When the Roman Catholic Church likes to boast of the fact that it never changes, that is poppycock. The Roman Catholic Church has always been changing, and they kept right on changing. They came into this era now represented by the church at Thyatira. In 606, for the first time, a Roman Catholic bishop of Rome, Boniface III, was now declared to be the pope of the church. It was not until Boniface III that there was actually a pope. Of course, then they had to say, "Well, we can't start with him. We've got to go back." So they filled in with the bishops of Rome, as they had records of them. Then they had to work their way back so that at the top of the pile they had St. Peter. And we have no historical record that Peter was ever even in the city of Rome, let alone that he was the bishop of Rome. But Boniface III was the first actual pope. He was declared the supreme pontiff of all Christendom.

Then in the year 709, they instituted another rather revolting development where an act of worship of God included kissing the pope's foot. So kissing the foot of the pope now became an official part of the worship procedure. That was also extended to kissing his ring, the fisherman's ring, which was, of course, inherited from the fish god Dagon, which the pagans used to wear.

**Relics**

In 786, another development came. This was the formalizing of the adoration again (but, in effect, the worship) of images and relics – bones of saints, or anything that they had touched, or something they had used. These were believed to have magical powers. So suddenly, these things became extremely valuable; particularly, pieces of the cross. There were enough pieces of the cross finally gathered, particularly after the crusades of the Middle Ages, that you could have put together something like 50,000 crosses. But they were all adored as parts of some contact that God had had with these things that gave them magical powers.

When I was a teenager in the city of Chicago growing up, I inherited somehow (I can't remember how) a rosary, and it had a cross on it – the crucifix (the dead Christ). This cross opened at the back, and at the bottom of it was a little red glob of dirt, and there was a printed form pasted on the inside of the shaft of the cross. It said, "This dirt has come from the foot of the cross of Jesus Christ with part of His blood." I thought that was fantastic. How many kids in Chicago have a piece of dirt from the cross of Jesus Christ with part of His blood in it? I was terribly impressed. I imagine there were tons of dirt around the city of Chicago in all those crucifixes. Is this for real? This is for real, and it all came back here in 786 when they began worshiping relics – something that they thought could give expression to their faith.

**Canonizing Saints**

In the year 850, they began the use of holy water in the process of their worship. In the year 995, they began the practice of what they called canonizing dead saints. Certain Roman Catholics were declared to be saints. Those never went to purgatory. They had so many good works that they had more than enough to merit salvation. They went directly to heaven. One of the reasons for this was so that the pope could build up a depository (a bank) of good works. This is called super arrogation. That is, these saints needed so many good works to get to heaven. But they were such wonderful people, they created more than they needed. So the pope was able to have this excess of good works so that he could later use them to distribute to people who needed these good works. To this day, the Roman pope can draw upon this depository of excessive good works of the saints, and he may distribute these to whomsoever he will, usually for a price. That was the principle of the indulgences that kicked off the Reformation. What the pope was doing when he was selling indulgences was giving you a little bit from the depository of the good works and the merit of the saints.

**Lent**

In the year 998, fasting on Fridays and during the period of Lent was inaugurated. Lent was a big thing in the Babylonian cult system.

**Celibacy of the Priesthood**

As the first 1,000 years rolled by, and they came to the year 1079, they decided that all priests henceforth must be single. They could not have wives. So celibacy of the priesthood was inaugurated. This, of course, was also a custom far back in the Babylonian system. In the year 1090, the prayer beads began. The rosary evolved out of the crusades again. The Muslims did this. They would find on the battlefields (as they would go over the dead bodies of the Muslims after the battles) that they had these beads. These beads were used by the Muslims for the same reason – to keep track of certain prayers. They would go through the beads, and they would say so many on this bead, and so many on that bead. Well, they thought that was a good idea. So the Catholic Church incorporated that bit of paganism.

**The Inquisition**

In the year 1184, the horrible Inquisition was authorized by the Roman papacy, where thousands upon thousands upon thousands were slaughtered – those who were non-Catholics who rejected the Roman church. You must remember that there was always a great body of believers who were Biblicists, in the finest tradition that you and I are, who rejected the Roman system. They were always under attack and persecution. Well, the Pope formalized dealing with those people in 1184 under the authority of the Inquisition that authorized certain priests to be able to capture people; to interrogate them relative to their devotion to the mother church; and, if they refused to express devotion to the church, they were then free to be executed. In the process of this, they could be tortured. Later on, during the Spanish Inquisition, this was used mightily, and it led to the downfall of Spain because what it did was killed off their middle class – the powerful middle class that made Spain the powerful nation that it was. Spain went down the tubes because of the Inquisition.

**The Sale of Indulgences**

Then in 1190 began the sale of indulgences. The pope closed the other concept, having previously established the idea of super works from saints. He now instituted the sale of indulgences so that you could buy merit for a price. That is still done today.

**Transubstantiation**

In the year 1215, the doctrine of transubstantiation was announced. Transubstantiation is the doctrine that declares that in the communion service, the bread actually becomes the real body of Christ, and the wine actually becomes the real blood of Christ. In this way, you are able to eat the body of Christ and to drink His blood, and thus to fulfill the Lord's requirement in order to be saved. In the year 1220 A.D. came the adoration of the wafer called the host. This was the bread itself. Once transubstantiation established that the bread itself became the body of Christ, then you could worship that piece of bread as worshiping Jesus Christ Himself. He is the Host of God, and the wafer itself is looked upon to this day as being in actuality the body of Jesus Christ.

In 1229, the Bible was forbidden to the laymen. There were groups forever giving the Roman church trouble. These were groups who somehow got access to Scripture. So the Pope finally made it a rule that laymen in the Roman church were not authorized to read the Bible, nor to protect them from confusion. In 1414, the wine in the communion service was forbidden to the laity. Up to this time, they had the wine and the wafer. Apparently the priest thought that was too good a thing to be wasting on people. So thereafter the priest drank the wine, and the people got the bread. That again, has been changed now in recent days. So if you go to a Roman Catholic mass, you get both elements.

**The Seven Sacraments**

In 1439, the doctrine of purgatory was officially decreed. Having been believed and taught for all these centuries, it was now made an official doctrine of the church. Also in 1439, the doctrine of the seven sacraments was now affirmed. There were seven specific sacraments declared as part of the Roman Catholic system. And if you wanted to go to heaven, since the work of Jesus Christ had not completed the provision of salvation, you had to complete it. And the way you did it was by these sacraments. They included the mass; marriage; confirmation; baptism; confession; and, so on.

In the year 1508, the Ave Maria was approved officially as an expression of praise and of worship of Mary. In 1534, following the impact of the Reformation, the Roman Catholics felt they needed a counter attack force. They needed a counter revolutionary force because they were caught completely off guard by what Martin Luther and the other reformers had done, and how the enlightenment of the Scriptures had swept across the civilized nations. So along came the Jesuit order, officially founded and authorized in 1534. It was the shock troops. To this day, the Jesuits are the Marine Corps of the Roman Catholic Church.

**The Apocrypha**

In 1545, tradition was granted equal authority with the Scriptures. Anything that came down as just tradition now became equivalent to what was recorded in Scripture. So, in effect, the Bible was considerably expanded, and with one blow, the Roman Catholic Church was able to answer the reformers as to why they taught certain things. They said because it's in tradition. Also, in order to give them a basis of authority, in 1546, they made the apocryphal books as part of the Bible. They didn't just add them onto the end of the Bible. They were now inserted into the actual canonical books of Scripture in the Old Testament. Apocryphal books are only in the Old Testament. These now were inserted as official books of the Bible. Many of the false doctrines that the Roman church (representing this Thyatira era) had instigated were all in these apocryphal books.

**The Immaculate Conception of Mary**

Making a big jump to 1854, the Roman Catholic Church declared a new doctrine to explain why Jesus Christ had been born without a sin nature. This is called the Doctrine of the Immaculate Conception of Mary. They explained the sinlessness of Jesus Christ (that is, His freedom from a sin nature) by saying that was because his mother was born without a sin nature. In 1864, The Syllabus of Errors was proclaimed. This was a formal document that declared what the Roman Catholic Church considered erroneous. No Catholic could believe those things on pain of excommunication. If you are excommunicated, and you die in that condition, you cannot go to heaven.

**The Infallibility of the Pope**

In the year 1870, the infallibility of the Pope was declared. Henceforth, it was said that when the pope speaks ex cathedra from his throne, whatever he says is the voice of God.

In 1930, they finally made a proclamation we could agree with. They condemned all the public schools. They were way ahead of us. They declared that, henceforth, Roman Catholics must not send their children to a public school, but must send them to a Catholic school.

**The Assumption of the Virgin Mary**

In 1950 (some of you will remember this) the latest doctrine promulgated by the Roman church was the assumption of the Virgin Mary. This was the declaration that Mary never died, but rose to heaven alive just like Jesus Christ did. This would lead us to expect that somewhere down the line, the next doctrine that's going to be proclaimed, at the right time, is the co-Mediatrix position of Mary – that she was a mediator between man and God with Jesus Christ, and thus a co-savior. In 1965, Mary was proclaimed the mother of the church.

**Salvation by Works**

Well you see by this that Rome does change. Whatever it says, it is not true that Rome is the same. The word Thyatira itself is rather interesting because it comes from two words. One of those words means "sacrifice," and the other word means "continual:" "continual sacrifice." This is exactly what the mass is. And the mass is the central heresy of this era of church history – the sacrifice of Jesus Christ anew in the mass. The unfinished work of Jesus Christ, which is proclaimed by the Roman Catholic Church, is completed by the mass; by the sacraments; by praying for the dead; by burning candles to gain divine favor; and, so on. The Roman Catholic Church did have a true concept of the deity of Christ, but after they understood clearly the deity of Jesus Christ as the God-man, they blew it completely on a works salvation. They misunderstood grace.

So the Catholic Church very quickly perverted the concept of grace into a works salvation – salvation by human works. I remind you again that when we say salvation by human works, we mean human doing. That's why I like to use the words "human doing," because a work is anything a human being can do. Thus, water baptism is a work. It is a human doing. When a group like the Church of Christ says you cannot go to heaven without water baptism, they are contradicting the very words of Scripture that say we are not saved by works. Then they try to play some mental gymnastics on you, and to evade the fact by saying, "Well, it's not a human work." Well, it's a human doing. Then they say, "Well, it is a human doing, but it is different than other human doings." How is it different? They say, "Because God has authorized it." Then you say, "Well, how about circumcision? God authorized that, and that certainly is a human doing, if anything is a human doing. That's a human work." That's exactly what we've already learned in Romans. The apostle Paul condemned the group of legalists who were telling people, "Unless your males are circumcised, they cannot go to heaven." Didn't God authorize circumcision? You see the nonsense of that – the attempt to evade human doing as something that a human being can do. That's what it is. That's what a work is. Human doing is a human work. So they came up with this system of salvation by doing: good deeds; penance; indulgences; and, so on. This is pure assumption of the whole Babylonian mystery religious system.

So where do we stand? Let's sum it up very quickly. Most of you probably are not acquainted with it. You've probably not been to a Roman Catholic Church service. But if you were within the Roman Catholic system, you would discover that one of the things you had to deal with was penance. You had to perform certain works as personal punishment, which was given you by the priest after you confessed your sins to him. He told you what you had to do to cover yourself on those sins. That is human works again. But Ephesians 2:8-9 says, "For by grace are you saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest any man should boast."

Mrs. Danish and I, a few years ago, were down in Guatemala. One of the things, as we visited the great Roman Catholic cathedrals, that I noticed was consistently true of them was that when you walked inside, it was dark and gloomy. Why such an atmosphere? Because it wants to convey to you the feeling of the wrath of God, and the hopelessness of you in your sin, because you are standing before divine holiness. For that, there is no hope. John 3:21 says, "But he that does truth comes to the light that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God." It is a shame for a place of worship to have a gloomy, dark atmosphere in it.

**Mystery**

Another thing you will notice in Roman Catholic churches is a mystery element. This borders on superstitious ignorance as you move away from the United States. I remember one of the outstanding cathedrals in Guatemala was the Santa Thomas Cathedral. It's famed for the fact that as you approach the great temple at Santa Thomas, on the front steps, the witch doctors are doing their thing. They're burning their incense; they're swinging their pots; and, they're doing their worship. And the Roman church does not dare drive them away. When you walk into that gloomy cathedral, I stood there and I watched one of the poor nationals as he bent over a little candle that he had bought. It was probably the size of my pen here in its diameter. He had lit it, and he was bowing and praying over and over again before this candle. And that was the sole focus and object of his worship, surrounded by this darkness as part of a mystery by which the Roman Catholic Church seeks to captivate and hold authority and control over its people.

In the Middle Ages, people almost went like a bunch of charismatic ecstatics, having a fantastic orgy at the moment when the priest in the process of the mass finally pronounced the famous and the secret words over the cup. Then he lifted it up, and at the moment of lifting it up, that cup exploded into the blood of Jesus Christ. People would fall back in shock, and they would go into ecstatics to be in the presence of this transformation – mystery. The mystery element is there. For that reason, the services were once in Latin. This is the veneration of the image of a dead Christ, and they always add to the mystery in certain places by making it a black dead Christ, or a red dead Christ, or a chartreuse dead Christ, or something else, in order to add to the mystery, and that becomes something very significant. All of this was to achieve a magical effect.

But Matthew 13:23 says, "But he that received seed in the good ground is he that hears the word and understands it, who also bears fruit and brings it forth, some hundredfold, some 60, and some 30." It is not the mystery of some ignorance, but it's the intelligent understanding of the Word of God that produces fruit. Of course, idolatry is at the core of this system. There are saints all over the place in the Roman Catholic Church for you to worship in the process of your visit there. Yet Exodus 20:4 says, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any carved image or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under it. Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them, for I, the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children of the third and fourth generation of them that hate me." Very clearly God says, "You cannot worship idol figures."

**Priestly Intercession**

There is, of course, the priestly intercession at the altar. You cannot approach God directly. You must have a priest who goes before you for you to have any contact with God. This in contrast to what the Scripture tells us. 1 Peter 2:9: "But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," so that we (each one of us) is a priest directly to God. Their system of praying, if you are in a Roman Catholic system, you will note, is a system that is but a variation of the pagan systems. Pagan praying is often done with what is called a prayer wheel. This is a wheel on which prayers are attached and written, and then the wheel is just spun. Every time it comes around, you've said a prayer. It is praying by rote. The Roman Catholics do that constantly. They pray repetitiously. One of the prayers they'll have is "Our Father." The other prayer that they will repeat is the "Hail Mary" prayer. All of this is structured on approaching God on a repetition of prayer.

**Rote Praying**

I've been in the presence of Roman Catholics who are dying. On one occasion, the husband approached the wife who was dying of cancer. It was clear she was near the end. He had turned to his daughter and said, "Have you called the priest for extreme unction?" She said, "Yes, he's on the way." Then he and his daughter went to his wife. They knelt down beside her and they said, "We're going to say six 'Hail Marys' for you." Then they proceeded. They repeated it six times over. Why did they do that? They were trying to comfort this mother that they were adding merit for her soul that she knew she was imminently going to have to face God with. She wanted everything she had in merit to finish what Christ had done.

I don't know if you saw the movie on television last week, A Bridge Too Far. It was one of the great ideas of General Montgomery in World War to finish the war after the landings in June on Normandy – to launch a campaign in August that would finish the war by Christmas. The concept was structured upon the fact that there were seven bridges that had to be taken – a shot-through Holland. The code was "market garden." They were going to drop paratroopers, and they were going to grab every one of these bridges, and then storm in with the allied troops right into Germany. If they could get to bridge number seven, they were across and into Germany. They had to get them all.

It was a very true movie, and it showed the Nijmegen Bridge that they simply could not take. Finally they discussed how you're going to take a bridge. One of the officers said, "The way to take a bridge is from both ends at once." So they decided to make a river crossing. They were going to do it at night, and the boats didn't get there for them to cross, so they had to do it in the daylight. As they were rowing across under artillery fire of the Germans in broad daylight, trying to get across that river and up the slopes to take the other end of the bridge, a very critical span for this operation, the movie showed that the men going across as the boats were being hit by artillery fire. Men were falling out as the result of the shell fragments. And suddenly one of them says, "Hail Mary, blessed art thou among women. Hail Mary, blessed art thou among women." And then all the men in the boats said, "Hail Mary, blessed art thou among women. Hail Mary, blessed art thou among women." And they're rowing like crazy: "Hail Mary, blessed art thou among women." I don't know whether that actually happened or not, but it was a demonstration of the paganism that is believed by the Roman Catholic church in its adoration and worship of Mary – that approaching her gives some power, especially if you repeat the prayer over and over again – empty repetitions.

We cannot help thinking of Matthew 6:7, where we read, "And when you pray, use not vain repetitions as the pagans do, for think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." Mary, of course, is the center of worship rather than Jesus Christ. In many Roman Catholic Churches, you'll walk in, and Jesus Christ is hanging on a cross off here to the side some place, but right there in the center you'll find a picture or an image of Mary. She is the center of worship. She can talk to her Son. She is the one who can do all these marvelous things. But in Colossians 1:18, we read, "And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things, He might have the preeminence" – not Mary.

**The Crucifix**

And, of course, the one final factor that you would see in a Roman Catholic Church is the crucifix itself: some representation of the dead Christ on the cross. That is the primary image of Jesus to a Roman Catholic. To them, He is not someone who as Scriptures in Hebrew 7:25 say, "He ever lives to make intercession for us." But they view Him as someone who is dead. That's the image they have of Jesus Christ. Revelation 1:18, however, says, "I am He that lives, and was dead. Behold, I am alive forevermore, amen, and have the keys of Hades and of death."

The first little church I ever pastored, in a way, was out in the country toward Garland, Texas, when I was a Dallas seminary student. When I became, in my seminary days, the pastor of that church (at least the regular speaker there), they had a pulpit, and right on the front of the pulpit, they had a picture of Christ hanging dead on the cross. That was the first thing you saw. That's the image you had as you came into that place. If you sat through the whole service, the only impression you had of Christ was the same as you have in a Roman Catholic Church – a dead Christ on a crucifix. Needless to say, I don't have to tell you what I did the first time I came in as the authority, and the first thing that went out the window – a travesty inherited from this pagan system.

Well, the city of Thyatira is an interesting city. It existed in New Testament Times. But we're going to find things in this church that indicated that Christianity in the local church was well on the way toward becoming the monstrosity that we know today as the Roman Catholic Church. This is the church at Thyatira, and this is our introduction to that church.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1977

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