

FOREWORD

Solomon said, “Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wearisome to the flesh” (Ecclesiastes 12:12). Estimates indicate that if a person read nothing more than the titles of the books that have been published, it would take him 300 years to read them all (*Ripley’s Believe It or Not Catalogue* 1985). However, not all books are the same. Some stand out as having made a difference, not as “wearisome to the flesh” but as lifting the spirit of the reader to heights of greater knowledge, wisdom and faith regarding spiritual truth. Joanne Howe’s book, *Biblical Answers to Catholic Questions*, is such a book.

The rarest kind of book is a book to be read. This is a book to be read not only by Catholics but also by everyone who is seeking Bible answers to the most important questions the human mind can pose. B.C. Goodpasture, former editor of the *Gospel Advocate*, wrote: “He who writes a good book may render mankind a greater service than he who amasses a fortune, wins a battle or founds an empire. Great books have been major forces in fashioning the lives and determining the destinies of men.” Howe’s books have had that kind of influence.

And now she has completed her third major work, another book that will without a doubt become a major force in making a difference in the lives of those who read it. Howe has taken a long journey in her life. From the time she gave up her father’s religion to become a New Testament Christian until today, she has devoted her life to studying, teaching and bringing lost souls to Christ for salvation. She shares that

adventure in this work, which is a culmination of her studies into the most important subjects found in the Bible.

The apostle Peter stated that God's "divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue" (2 Peter 1:3). That knowledge is provided by God's written Word (vv. 3-21). Howe's book emphasizes the necessity of going to the Bible for our wellspring of knowledge that we may be provided answers from the mind of God, spoken first by His Son and written down through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by the apostles and prophets of the first century (John 14:24-26; 16:12-15; Hebrews 1:2; Ephesians 3:5).

I am grateful to Joanne Howe for taking the several years required to write and publish this book. It is a valuable tool for the serious-minded student of God's Word and those who hunger and thirst after the righteousness of God, which can be found only in Scripture. Through hundreds of scriptures, she presents and validates with great convincing power the truthfulness on which the Christian faith should be based because "faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God" (Romans 10:17). My prayer and hope is that much fruit will be harvested for the kingdom of Christ and the glory of God through the circulating of this profitable presentation of the truth that makes us free in Christ.

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PREFACE

“Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth”

(2 Timothy 2:15).

In 1971, after hours of counseling, study, worry and fear of betrayal to my faith as a Roman Catholic, I struggled with the decision I had to make in following the will of God as contained in the Bible. I thought back over the 19 years I had lived as a nun, fulfilling a vow I made to God at age 10 and serving Him in this capacity. As a third generation Catholic, I grew up loving the people of my Catholic faith – their heritage, their customs, their doctrines and, most especially, their rituals as a way of life. I believed and never questioned those in the hierarchy when told they spoke for God and their proclamations were ordained for me to follow to attain salvation.

During the Dark Ages, it was a crime for anyone to deviate from what was decreed by the hierarchy in Rome. The Roman church built up her religious power by absolute control over all who came under her rule. Many were burned at the stake for owning a Bible. I remember being horrified when learning of the price many believers paid for their search for truth. Whatever cost I had to pay should I leave my parents’ religion was a sacrifice I was willing to make. My sincere desire to follow Christ led me to investigate the traditions and doctrines through my personal study of God’s Word as presented in the Bible. I asked myself the following questions:

When did the Roman Catholic Church begin? Does the Roman Catholic Church have a legitimate claim on apostolic succession? Was Peter chosen to be the first Pope? Do I know the history and development of the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church? Do these doctrines agree with the teachings of Christ? Are the sacraments of the Roman Catholic Church able to make me holy and acceptable to God? Does Catholicism teach that its doctrine and beliefs can lead me to heaven? Is Roman Catholicism the faith Christ would have me to believe and practice?

The more I read God's Word in an attempt to justify my Catholic beliefs, the more I realized God's truths held the answers to many of my questions and were in opposition to Catholic doctrines. I came to realize I could not earn God's favor and make myself acceptable to Him through an endless succession of various rituals, meritorious works and sacraments not ordained by God. I was confronted by an aching question from the depths of my heart: Should I leave my father's religion?

While reading the Douay Bible (my Catholic Bible), I gave serious consideration to a passage recorded in God's Word: "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1).

After months of study, prayer and all that is involved in the decision-making process, I left my Catholic faith, believing and accepting God's Word to be the only way, the only truth and the only life for me. God's teachings have equipped me for the life I now live and the eternity I hope to experience with God. My faith in the revelations of God's Word has deepened my love for my Lord and has strengthened the surrender of my heart and life to Him. It has lifted the blindness of my mind and heart and has carried me on an endless search for godly truths. I have a deeply settled peace in my soul because God's Word has given me confidence to be His ambassador, heralding His truths to a world of religious ignorance and false teachings. I stand with the apostle Paul when he said, "For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16).

As a result of my change of lifestyle and biblical beliefs, I wrote my first book, *A Change of Habit*. This book is my autobiography and my testimony to God's love, mercy and grace. It goes into greater detail on my reasons for entering the convent and why I left after 19 years of service.

My second book, *From Nun to Priest*, is a comparison of Catholic doctrines and biblical teachings. It has been a tremendous help to meeting the needs of many Roman Catholics and others seeking to understand God's Word versus the traditions of men.

Long ago as a young child, I learned about my Catholic faith through my study and memorization of the *Baltimore Catechism*. It presented a question and then gave the theological answer, minus scriptural references. Concerning the origin of another Catholic catechism (*Compendium: Catechism of the Catholic Church*), Ron Rhodes describes that it was "written under the direction of Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, the present Pope now known as Benedict XVI, and was approved by Pope John Paul II in 1992. It is a statement of the Roman Catholic's faith and doctrines attested to or illumined by sacred scripture, apostolic tradition, and the Magisterium (the Catholic Church's teaching body)" (21).

The first lesson of the *Baltimore Catechism* contains questions and answers related to mankind's existence:

“1. Who made us?”

God made us.

2. Who is God?

God is the Supreme Being, infinitely perfect, Who made all things and keeps them in existence.

3. Why did God make us?

God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with us His everlasting happiness in heaven” (9).

This question-and-answer method was used to educate me to the teachings of Catholicism and to give me a solid grounding on which to build my faith. This material was so strongly enforced by the nuns and the priests that even today I can quote the *Baltimore Catechism*. Catholicism was in my blood as a culture I inherited from my parents and grandparents. In other words, I was a “cradle Catholic.”

I have chosen to use a similar format for this book. It is designed to become a biblical catechism for anyone seeking godly truths. Peter reminded us of our need to be ready to give a scriptural defense for our beliefs and traditions (1 Peter 3:15). Please note that not every question posed comes from the Catholic catechism, but these are included to address commonly held misunderstandings.

To understand what God wants us to believe and how to live those beliefs necessitates a knowledge of His Word. A biblical catechism for those Catholics seeking God's truths is long overdue in acquiring this knowledge. Sincere believers will often come to different opinions, thus formulating their own beliefs and conclusions. However, only God's Word holds the moral absolutes of who we are, what we need to believe and what road we need to take as we journey to our final destiny in eternity.

Since becoming a student of God's Word, I have come to realize that memorization of Scripture often becomes part of one's knowledge and life's application when understanding godly truths. In this biblical catechism, a question will be posed. Some questions will teach biblical doctrine while other questions will pertain to the doctrines and traditions taught by the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church. The answer that follows will come from the truth revealed by God's Holy Spirit in the Bible, using book, chapter and verse. In some sections, a comment will be made about a particular doctrine. If there is any catechism in the world, the Bible must be the standard for it.

As I prayed, planned and prepared to bring a biblical searchlight from God's Word for Catholics and others, it is my compassionate, loving and heartfelt belief that this book will bring the truths of God's wonderful gospel and His amazing grace to every seeking heart. The abundant life with God is ours for the choosing, for He will never force His teachings on us. We must choose them. Our faith is not just a matter of believing in God but also of trusting in His dependability to do what is right and to fulfill His promises. "[H]e who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him" (Hebrews 11:6).

This book will quickly help you find God's answers to legitimate questions and critical doctrines at the heart of Roman Catholicism. Your faith in God and His inspired Word can and will operate in you for your good and for God's glory.

In conclusion, I want you, the reader, to know that I love those in my former faith. My motivation for writing this book is based on the same desire that the apostle Paul had for his beloved people, the Jews, when he wrote these words for them: "Brethren, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved. For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge" (Romans 10:1-2).