

NO LONGER SEARCHING

FOREWORD

It is a wonderful experience for somebody who has been searching for many years to finally be able to say, "I am NO LONGER SEARCHING!" My own personal search for the assurance of salvation included long years of walking in spiritual darkness.

My involvement in religious activities and a genuine effort to do my best never brought me the assurance I needed, the certainty that my sins had been forgiven and that I would go to Heaven when I died. I faithfully adhered to the teachings of my Church and sincerely made every effort to lead a good life. However, having done all this I still had no assurance that I, or the Church to which I belonged, had done enough to secure my salvation.

The assurance for which I had been searching finally came to me as I was reading the Scriptures. I discovered that my salvation did not depend upon what I could do but upon what Jesus Christ had done for me. God said in His Word that my sins could never be forgiven as a result of my own good works or by my involvement in religious activities. I could never earn or merit salvation.

But Christ earned it for me by paying in full the penalty for the guilt of all my sins. These were put to His account. The merits of Christ's sinless life and His substitutionary death on the cross would be put to my account. My sins would be forgiven as a result of Christ's work on my behalf. Here in God's Word was the assurance of eternal life! My search was over.

It is my prayer that this little booklet, which contains a short account of God's love for a sinner, will help someone who is still searching to know that assurance of eternal life. ['And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son'.¹](#)

THE EARLY DAYS

On Sunday, 22 February 1948 the streets in the town of Thurles in County Tipperary, were covered with snow. At seven o' clock in the morning I was born in Saint Mary's Hospital. A few days later my father and grandmother brought me to the Cathedral of the Assumption. One of the local priests baptised me that morning and enrolled me as a member of the Roman Catholic Church. My Uncle John and Aunt Ellen were my godparents. At my baptism I was given the names Richard Joseph. My grandfather, on my father's side, was Richard (Dick) Keogh. Dick had fought with the Allies during the First World War. At Flanders he was badly wounded in action. He died a few years before I was born so I was given his name. I was also given the name Joseph, in honour of Saint Joseph the worker, husband of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

For many generations our family had been devout Roman Catholics. One of my father's ancestors had allowed her home to be used as a Chapel. My mother was a devout worshipper of Mary, the Mother of Perpetual Succour. She was very much involved in saying Novenas and the Rosary. In most Irish families at that time the mother was responsible for the religious practices in the home. When I was a child, mother gathered the family together each evening after tea. We would then kneel down on the kitchen floor and say the Rosary to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Mother also had great devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus. There was a picture of the Sacred Heart on our kitchen wall. The names of the members of our family were written on the picture. We had all been dedicated to the Sacred Heart.

My father was a hard-working man who supported his family by availing of every opportunity to earn a few extra pounds. Like his father before him he was employed by the Irish Sugar

Company. He specialised as a sugar cook during the yearly sugar beet campaigns. He was a member of the Holy Family Confraternity. These men had dedicated themselves to the worship of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, known collectively as the Holy Family. The members of the Confraternity recited the 'Prayer of Commendation' at their weekly meetings. The words of this prayer are: *'Jesus, Mary and Joseph, I give you my heart and my soul; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, assist me in my last agony; Jesus, Mary and Joseph, may I breathe forth my soul in peace with you, Amen'*. My father also attended religious retreats at the Redemptorist Retreat House in Limerick. These retreats consisted of times of prayer, meditation and instruction.

When I was five years old I started school at the local convent which was run by the nuns of the Presentation Order. The main objective of my time with the nuns was to prepare me for my First Confession and First Communion. As part of my preparation I confessed my sins each week to the nun who was teaching me. Then one day she took us to the Chapel. For the first time in my life I entered a confessional box. Although this was only a practice run I was very nervous. Kneeling in the darkness of the confessional box I anxiously awaited the big moment. After what seemed an eternity, the priest opened the slide and listened as I confessed my sins.

However, I knew the priest was not the only one to whom I was confessing, for I had been instructed to recite the prayer known as 'The Confiteor'. I proudly rattled off the words of this prayer: *'I confess to Almighty God, to Blessed Mary ever a virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and to all the Saints, that I have sinned exceedingly in thought, word and deed; through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault. Therefore, I beseech the Blessed Virgin Mary, Blessed Michael the Archangel, Blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and all the Saints, to pray to the Lord our God for me'*. Having confessed my sins to so many I was very relieved to hear the priest pronounce absolution. As I left the confessional box I was delighted that the practice run had gone so well.

Eventually the day of my official First Confession arrived. I was hoping I would not forget any of the sins I had committed. After listening to my confession the priest said to me, *"I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."* He told me to say a certain number of 'Hail Marys' for my Penance. As I knelt in prayer before the altar in the Chapel I felt a great sense of relief. I was so grateful that the priest had forgiven all of the sins I had committed in thought, word and deed.

Now I was ready to receive my First Communion. I arrived at the Cathedral proudly wearing my new suit, shirt, tie, socks and shoes. The special First Communion medal was pinned to the lapel of my suit. I carried the new prayer book, known as a missal, and a set of Rosary beads. I had been fasting since midnight. The communion mass began at eleven o' clock in the morning. After singing a number of hymns at least one hundred children walked, two at a time, to the altar rails. As I knelt with my hands joined in prayer the Archbishop took a host (wafer) from the chalice. He repeated the words, *'the Body of Christ'*, and then placed the host on my tongue. I had been taught that the bread and wine had, by the act of Transubstantiation, been transformed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ. So I believed I was receiving Christ as I swallowed the host.

Shortly after receiving my First Communion I attended the Christian Brothers' School. During the next five years I was prepared for my Confirmation. When the big day arrived the Archbishop anointed me with oil which was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. I had been instructed that the Holy Spirit would now make me a strong and perfect Christian and a soldier of Jesus Christ.

Some months after receiving my Confirmation I was enrolled in the Christian Brothers' Secondary School. A missionary priest visited the school one day. He encouraged us to consider dedicating our lives to God by becoming priests or Christian brothers. A few of us showed some interest in the possibility of a vocation. He gave us some literature concerning the religious life. I discussed the matter with my parents who were very helpful and

supportive. After a lot of consideration I decided the religious life was not for me. Some time later I enrolled as a pupil in the Vocational School.

The nuns, Christian brothers and priests had taught me that the Roman Catholic Church was the 'One True Church'. I had been told that *'outside of the Roman Catholic Church there is no salvation'*. But I knew from my own experience that inside that same Church there was no assurance of salvation. I also knew I was no different than my school friend who was a member of a Protestant Church. Both of us were hoping we would get to Heaven one day, but we didn't know if we would. Membership of the Church and regular attendance at mass and the sacraments failed to give me the assurance of salvation. Participation in weekend retreats, fasting and self denial could give me no guarantee of eternal life. I was just hoping that all would be well in the end.

Religion was one of my favourite subjects in school. Over the years I had learned some of the parables of Jesus. However, I cannot remember the Bible ever being used in any of the schools I attended. I often wondered why this was so, as I always believed the Bible to be God's Word. Moreover, when I was growing up we were not encouraged to read the Scriptures. If we did read the Bible we were not allowed to interpret it. According to our *Summary of Christian Doctrine*, *'We are bound, moreover, to believe whatever God teaches us by His holy Church, who in her teaching cannot deceive us nor be deceived. The Pope amongst other ways infallibly makes her teaching known to us, when he speaks ex-Cathedra'*. ‡ So all of our teaching, including the interpretation of the Scriptures, was to come through the Church.

In the history books it is recorded that the Roman Catholic Church at one stage declared the Bible to be a 'forbidden book'. The public burning of the Scriptures had been authorised by the Pope and carried out by his loyal subjects. This amazed me! Was the message of the Inspired Word of God so dangerous that the ordinary people should not be allowed to read it?

The names of Cranmer, Ridley, Martin Luther, John Calvin, John Knox and Zwingli were also included in the history books. Martin Luther was associated with the Protestant Reformation and Justification by Faith. These men, along with many other like-minded reformers, were classified as being heretics, but I had a certain amount of admiration for them. It was obvious they had a great love for the Scriptures. Some of them were willing to suffer severe persecution as a result of their efforts to bring the light of the Gospel to those who dwelt in the darkness of superstition and tradition. Some of the 'heretics' were martyred, and had gone to their deaths declaring a personal, saving faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. They faced death in the full assurance that the blood of Jesus had redeemed them. They testified to having been justified by God. I realised these people were not just hoping they would go to Heaven. They knew! I longed to have that same assurance.

HOPING AND SEARCHING

When I left school I worked with two local undertakers. I have many memories of that time. I recall a black coffin that was made for a Christian brother. His final resting-place was in the graveyard of the local monastery. Priests were buried facing the setting sun, while everyone else was buried facing the rising sun.

The most expensive coffin we made was an oak casket. Some months before he died a wealthy businessman contacted the undertaker and placed his order. He required comfort and style. He insisted the interior should contain a mattress, pillow and plush lining, all tastefully covered in pink velvet material. Some time later, after one of the largest funerals ever seen in our town, the fancy casket, containing his mortal remains, was placed in his family vault.

In complete contrast to this were the paupers. These unfortunates died in the Workhouse (County Home). Some of the paupers had no living relatives. Others had been 'signed in' by their families, who then abandoned them. A pauper's funeral expenses were covered by the

State. The cheapest coffin was provided. It had no fancy handles or trimmings. The funeral cortege very often consisted of the priest, the undertaker and his assistant. Occasionally, passers-by had to be called upon to carry the coffin into the graveyard. The paupers were buried in a certain area of the cemetery especially reserved for them.

I also remember a Protestant funeral. We had great difficulty in deciding if we would put a foot across the threshold of their church building. We actually considered leaving the coffin on the steps of the building. The nuns, priests and Christian brothers had warned us against ever setting foot inside such a place. We had been told that to do so would be sin.

While working with the undertakers I was reminded of the fact that, whether a person was a millionaire or a pauper he still had two appointments to keep. His first appointment was with death. The second appointment was at the judgement seat of God and was, as far as I was concerned, the one to be feared most. I knew there would be no priest or minister there to speak on the person's behalf. There would be no angel or Saint there to represent him. I knew he would have to stand alone before God's judgement seat. It did not matter which Church he had belonged to. It did not matter how large his funeral had been. His fancy casket may have been placed in a vault or his cheap coffin buried in the paupers' plot. It did not matter. He still had that appointment at God's judgement throne.

STILL SEARCHING

I always loved music. I got my first kit of drums when I was fifteen years old. Some time later I joined a local rock group. After spending a year playing 'heavy' music I joined a showband. During the sixties the showband scene was very big in Ireland. We travelled to many parts of the country and played in ballrooms, marquees, hotels and parish halls. All of the dance halls in the south of Ireland closed during the season of Lent. It then became necessary for most of the showbands to travel to England or Scotland in search of work. We did this in 1966. We toured England, playing mainly in Irish clubs. We met a lot of Irish emigrants, many of whom were homesick. In 1968 I played drums with a pop group. We recorded two songs in the Eamonn Andrews' Studios in Dublin. Later on I formed my own group and played guitar and banjo in many venues in County Tipperary.

It was while I was involved in the music business that I met Mary. We were married in a little country Chapel in 1967. Both of us were devout Roman Catholics and regularly attended mass and the sacraments. When our three sons were born we had them baptised into the Roman Catholic Church. I was very religious but had never read the Bible. My parents had bought a large family Bible when we were all young. We often opened it to look at the lovely pictures it contained but it was never read.

Now, many years later, I had a family of my own. But I still did not know God's plan of salvation as outlined in the Scriptures. I was depending upon being a good Roman Catholic. I was faithfully attending mass and the sacraments. I was doing my best to be a good husband, a good parent and a good neighbour. I was hoping all of this would help to get me to Heaven.

THREE QUESTIONS

One evening in November 1975, while on my way to a ballad session, I met a good friend of mine. He had left Thurles some time previously and moved to Limerick. Unknown to me this man, who was also from a Roman Catholic background, had recently been converted. He had returned to Thurles for the weekend, and was determined to meet me. When we met he told me that something wonderful had happened to him. He said he now knew he would go to Heaven when he died. He based this assurance upon what he had read in the Scriptures. He told me that he had read in God's Word of how Christ had died on the cross for him as an individual.

He took his Bible from his pocket and showed me some verses in the New Testament. I read of how God so loved the world that He sent His own Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, into this world to die upon the cross in our place. I read of how Jesus became our substitute, our sin-bearer and paid in full the penalty for the guilt of our sins. I was amazed that God could love me, for I knew I was a sinner. I was amazed that He would give His own Son, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God, to suffer and to die on my behalf.

My friend told me he had a great assurance that his sins had been forgiven. This assurance was not based upon what he himself could do to earn or merit salvation. It was based upon what Christ had done on his behalf. This good news of Christ's work on the sinner's behalf was, he told me, clearly outlined in the Scriptures. He then encouraged me to read God's Word for myself. I had been searching for many years for the assurance of salvation. I had been hoping I would find it. My friend had found this assurance as he read the Scriptures. So I took his advice. With a heart that was hungering for the truth I began to search the Scriptures.

One of the first portions of the Bible I read dealt with issues of great importance to me. In the book of Hebrews I read the following words: 'For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf. And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice'.¹

The words, 'But now...he has appeared' caused me to ask three questions – WHO? WHY? and HOW?

- Firstly, who had appeared? The answer to this question was clear. Christ Himself had appeared. I saw this specifically outlined in the following portion of the Scriptures: 'But when the right time came, God sent his Son, born of a woman, subject to the law. God sent him to buy freedom for us who were slaves to the law, so that he could adopt us as his very own children'.² God the Son left the splendour of Heaven and took upon Himself human nature. The apostle John puts it like this: 'So the Word became human and made his home among us. He was full of unfailing love and faithfulness. And we have seen his glory, the glory of the Father's one and only Son'.³ This meant that God the Son, one of the three persons in the Trinity, now had two natures. He had a Divine nature, being Eternal God. But now He also assumed or took upon Himself human nature.
- Secondly, why had God the Son come to earth? For what purpose did He come? The answer to this question was contained in the words I had just read: 'He appeared to remove sin'.
- Thirdly, how did He put away sin? How did he do away with sin? How did He accomplish this? The answer was clearly stated in the verses I had been reading. Christ came to remove sin by His own death as a sacrifice.

Here it was, outlined so clearly in God's Word. Christ had come into the world for a specific purpose. He came 'to put away sin'. He accomplished this 'by the sacrifice of Himself'. What a great blessing this was to me! I had been searching for the truth. I had been searching for the assurance of salvation. And now I was reading in the Scriptures of how Christ had actually dealt with sin. This included my sin. He laid down His life on the cross at Calvary, dying there as my substitute. By doing this He paid in full the penalty for the guilt of my sin.

The light of the Gospel was beginning to penetrate the darkness of my heart.

COPIES

I had always been amazed at how fearful some people were of the Scriptures. Some of the world's superpowers, like Russia and China, would not allow the Bible across their borders. Governments in many other countries also feared the Bible to the degree that they forbade their people to read it. Millions of people, in many parts of the world, did not have access to the Bible. Now my friend had given to me a copy of the Scriptures and I was determined to read it.

As I read God's Word I discovered that the words, 'shadows', and 'figures', as recorded in the book of Hebrews, related to a very important and fundamental area concerning the ministry of Jesus Christ: 'That is why the Tabernacle and everything in it, which were copies of things in heaven, had to be purified by the blood of animals. But the real things in heaven had to be purified with far better sacrifices than the blood of animals. For Christ did not enter into a holy place made with human hands, which was only a copy of the true one in heaven. He entered into heaven itself to appear now before God on our behalf...The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves. The sacrifices under that system were repeated again and again, year after year, but they were never able to provide perfect cleansing for those who came to worship'.¹

Here, in the book of Hebrews, God's Word was speaking of copies, types, shadows and figures of things. These copies were not the realities themselves, but simply a picture of things to come. For example, in the Old Testament religious system there was a high priest appointed. He was a copy, type, or shadow of Jesus Christ, who would later come as the perfect high priest and minister on behalf of His people. The Old Testament high priest's ministry is outlined in the following words: 'Every high priest is a man chosen to represent other people in their dealings with God. He presents their gifts to God and offers sacrifices for their sins. And he is able to deal gently with ignorant and wayward people because he himself is subject to the same weaknesses. That is why he must offer sacrifices for his own sins as well as theirs'.² The high priest was therefore the peoples' representative. He was their mediator between God and man. But in this capacity he was only a copy or shadow of Jesus Christ. Jesus was the REAL high priest and, when He would come, there would no longer be any need for the copies. Their ministry would become obsolete.

As I continued to read I could see the High Priesthood of Jesus Christ outlined in the following portions of the Bible.

He is described as:

- **Human, as well as Divine:** 'Because God's children are human beings—made of flesh and blood—the Son also became flesh and blood. For only as a human being could he die, and only by dying could he break the power of the devil, who had the power of death.³ Therefore, it was necessary for him to be made in every respect like us, his brothers and sisters so that he could be our merciful and faithful High Priest before God. Then he could offer a sacrifice that would take away the sins of the people.⁴ And so, dear brothers and sisters who belong to God and are partners with those called to heaven, think carefully about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's messenger and High Priest'.⁵
- **Sympathetic:** 'So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin'.⁶
- **Divinely Appointed:** 'That is why Christ did not honor himself by assuming he could become High Priest. No, he was chosen by God, who said to him, "You are my Son. Today I have become your Father." And in another passage God said to him, "You are a priest forever in the order of Melchizedek."⁷

- **Eternal:** 'Jesus has already gone in there for us. He has become our eternal High Priest in the order of Melchisedech'.⁸
- **Sinless:** 'He is the kind of high priest we need because he is holy and blameless, unstained by sin. He has been set apart from sinners and has been given the highest place of honor in heaven'.⁹
- **Exalted:** 'Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven.¹⁰ So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world.¹¹ And since we have a great High Priest who rules over God's house'.¹²

So here it was, outlined in such great detail. And yet it was so easy to understand. Before Christ came into the world there were high priests appointed. But they were only copies, types or shadows and their ministry ended when Jesus, the great high priest, came. The copies were then no longer necessary, for the reality had come.

RELICS AND MEDIATORS

We had a lot of holy pictures in our home when I was growing up. There were pictures of the Blessed Virgin Mary and many of the Saints. However, in our home a relic was the object of greatest importance. A relic can be a piece of hair or bone from a saint's body. Or it may be a piece of his or her clothing or one of their possessions. It might even be some article that was touched by the Saint. We, like most Roman Catholic families, believed that these relics had supernatural healing powers. We depended very much upon a relic of Blessed Martin de Porres, who was later canonised a Saint. This was a piece of cloth that had touched one of his bones. If any of our family were ill mother would touch the affected part of the body with the relic. She would then pray, asking Blessed Martin for healing.

Like most women in the Roman Catholic Church, mother would say a Novena to some of the Saints. The Novena consisted of nine consecutive days of specific prayers. Many people promised their favourite Saint they would say a Novena each month for the rest of their lives if their requests were granted. Some people promised to give up smoking or drinking alcohol. Others decided to stop attending the cinema or the dance hall. Many promised to give up using sugar in their tea or jam on their bread. Several promised to abstain from eating meat. They willingly made sacrifices as they sought answers to their prayers. But many of these dear people then lived in constant fear of ever breaking the promise. They believed if they broke the promise there would be a relapse into sickness, or that some other misfortune would manifest itself. They, or the person for whom they had been praying, might be the recipient of some calamity.

Many of our friends had relics in their homes. But there are also several relics on display in Roman Catholic Chapels in many parts of the world. The people venerate these relics. In Spain, in the *Camera Santa* at Oveida there is a piece of Moses' rod, a piece of Mary Magdalene's hair, one of Saint Peter's sandals and his leather wallet. There is also on display a piece of Lazarus's tomb, along with some crumbs left over after the feeding of the five thousand. One of the silver pieces for which Judas betrayed the Lord is also on exhibition. Pride of place goes to a portion of the 'True Cross'. This, it is claimed, is a piece of the cross upon which the Saviour died.

At Palma there is on display one of Saint Stephen's bones, along with part of the Blessed Virgin Mary's dress and a remnant of Saint Joseph's coat. There is also a piece of the column at which Christ was flagellated and part of the robe with which Herod's soldiers covered Him. A piece of the sponge offered to Christ while He was on the cross, along with three thorns from His crown and another fragment of the 'True Cross', complete this display of relics. A large number of relics, including the seamless robe of Christ, Mary's wedding ring, linen and locks of her hair can also be seen. There is also a large number of bones,

arms, legs, hair, garments and different possessions of Saints and martyrs on display. All of these relics are vitally important to devout Roman Catholics.

Most of the families we knew also had their favourite mediators and prayed to them regularly. I had prayed to Blessed Martin for many years and had depended upon him to intercede for me. But I now decided to examine the Scriptures to see what God had to say in His Word concerning mediators. I had already discovered that the Old Testament high priests had mediated on behalf of the people. But I was amazed as I read what God's Word said concerning the fact that their ministry ended very suddenly. In the book of Hebrews it states that 'There were many priests under the old system, for death prevented them from remaining in office'.¹ In other words, death prevented them from continuing in office. Death prevented them from continuing their ministry. This meant they could only mediate on behalf of the people until the moment of death. After death they could mediate no longer.

As a Roman Catholic I had been taught that there were people who could mediate on our behalf even after they had died. After mass we would pray: 'O God, our refuge and our strength, look down in mercy on Thy people who cry to Thee; and by the Intercession of the glorious and Immaculate Virgin Mary, Mother of God, of Saint Joseph her spouse, of Thy blessed Apostles Peter and Paul, and of all Thy saints, in mercy and goodness hear our prayers for the conversion of sinners, and for the liberty and exaltation of our holy mother, the Church'. This prayer was included in the mass by direction of Pope Pius XI and was offered for the conversion of Russia. The role of the Blessed Virgin and the Saints as mediators was therefore one of great importance. Their intercession was depended upon very much. But the Word of God states that even the high priests were prevented by death from continuing their ministry. They could not mediate for the people after death.

As I read I began to wonder if there were any mediators in Heaven. I wondered if anybody in Heaven had this ministry. My questions were answered when I read the following verse: 'For, There is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus'.² The Word of God makes it clear that the ministry of Jesus Christ is completely different to that of the people whose ministry ended at death: 'But because Jesus lives forever, his priesthood lasts forever. Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save those who come to God through him. He lives forever to intercede with God on their behalf'.³

Jesus, who died and rose again, has therefore a permanent priesthood. He is the ONLY One who has a permanent priesthood. He is the ONLY One who ministers as a priest in Heaven. He is the ONLY One who ministers as a mediator in Heaven. As the ONLY mediator, He is the ONLY One who can approach the Father on the sinner's behalf. Jesus Himself said, 'Then Jesus said, "Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest."⁴ Jesus invited people to come directly to Him. He did not tell us to pray to the Blessed Virgin or the Saints first and ask them to mediate on our behalf. What He did say was, "Come unto me".

I could now see a great difference between what I had been taught and what the Word of God said. I had been told that there were many mediators. I had prayed to Mary and many of the Saints, firmly believing they could approach the Lord and influence Him on my behalf. But now I could see in the Scriptures that there is only One who can interceded on our behalf. 'For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus'.⁵ As far as I was concerned the Word of God had become the final authority. Having been in spiritual darkness for so long the light was finally beginning to dawn.

ALONE

Shortly after leaving school I was employed at a local cinema as a ticket checker. I worked six nights each week and also on Saturday and Sunday afternoons. We usually had four different films showing each week. But sometimes a film was retained for a full week, including matinees. This meant I would see the same film eight times. I remember when the film 'South Pacific' was showing for a week. I memorised most of the songs in the film, having heard them eight times.

Some of the films made a great impression on me. One of these was Cecil B. de Mille's 'The Ten Commandments.' The night of the Passover, the plagues in Egypt, the opening of the Red Sea, and the making of the golden calf were all vividly portrayed in this highly-acclaimed film. This certainly helped to make me aware of the great interest God had in delivering His people from bondage.

Now, many years later, I was reading in God's Word the actual account of His dealings with His people. As I read about the tabernacle and the priesthood I discovered that the word, 'alone' was very significant: 'When these things were all in place, the priests regularly entered the first room as they performed their religious duties. But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance'.¹

The ordinary priests, though they were representatives of the people, were only allowed to minister in the outer room of the tabernacle. They could play no part at all in the ministry in the inner room, the Holy of Holies. The high priest ALONE entered there. When it came to the matter of atonement being made for the sins of the people the priests had to stay outside. The high priest ALONE was allowed to enter the Holy of Holies. The high priest ALONE, as mediator and representative of the people, was allowed to approach God on the Day of Atonement.

I had already seen in the Scriptures that this high priest was a copy, or type of Jesus Christ. When it comes to the matter of atonement being made for the sins of the people Christ ALONE, as our great high priest, can approach the Father in Heaven. In the tabernacle the other priests were not even allowed into the presence of God when atonement was to be made for sin. This was a copy of what happens in Heaven. Nobody else in Heaven is even allowed to approach God the Father concerning atonement for the sins of the people. Jesus ALONE is allowed to stand before the Father and minister as mediator. He is the ONLY mediator between God and man. He ALONE stands as mediator between a holy God and sinners.

Coming from a Roman Catholic background I was amazed to read this in God's Word. I had believed that Mary and the Saints could actually approach God on my behalf. In fact I believed they could even ask Him to forgive my sins. The Intercession of Mary and the Saints was certainly encouraged in some of the prayers said at mass. For example: *'Receive, O Holy Trinity, this offering, ...and in honour of Blessed Mary ever Virgin, of blessed John the Baptist, the holy Apostles Peter and Paul, and all the saints; that it may avail to their honour and our salvation; may they vouchsafe to intercede for us in Heaven... The glorious and ever-virgin Mary, ... Thy blessed Apostles and Martyrs, and all Thy saints; by whose merits and prayers grant that we may be ... strengthened by Thy protecting help'. ‡*

Once again I could see such a vast difference between man's traditions and God's Word. Concerning atonement being made for my sins it was now very clear to me that Christ ALONE could approach the Father on my behalf. Christ ALONE is the high priest. He ALONE is the mediator in Heaven. Yes, that word, 'ALONE' is so significant!

THE BLOOD

As I watched the film, 'The Ten Commandments', I was reminded of the Israelites who were in captivity in Egypt. On the night of the Passover the Israelites killed a lamb and applied its blood to the doorposts and lintels of their houses. Now, many years later, as I read the Scriptures I could see the significance of this. God said to Moses, "On that night I will pass through the land of Egypt and strike down every firstborn son and firstborn male animal in the land of Egypt. I will execute judgment against all the gods of Egypt, for I am the LORD! But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt."¹

It was so vitally important that the lamb should be sacrificed and the blood applied. This was their only protection from the judgement that was about to come. God had said, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” The significance of the blood became very clear as I read the Scriptures: ‘In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness’.² This was demonstrated very specifically on the Day of Atonement as the high priest entered the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle. The writer to the Hebrews describes it as follows: ‘But only the high priest ever entered the Most Holy Place, and only once a year. And he always offered blood for his own sins and for the sins the people had committed in ignorance.’³ And he [Jesus] did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal’.⁴

Unless the high priest brought the blood with him he could not approach God concerning atonement for sin. The death of an innocent victim, an animal selected by the priest, was substitutionary. In other words, the penalty for the sins of the people was borne by another. The blood was then offered by the high priest to make atonement for the sins of the people. The blood was the evidence shown to God that the penalty for the sins of the people had been paid. The penalty had not been paid by the people themselves but by one who stood in their place as their substitute

Now this was a copy or type of what would happen when Christ came. I could see this outlined in such great detail in the following verses: ‘So Christ has now become the High Priest over all the good things that have come. He has entered that greater, more perfect Tabernacle in heaven, which was not made by human hands and is not part of this created world. With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever. Under the old system, the blood of goats and bulls and the ashes of a heifer could cleanse people’s bodies from ceremonial impurity. Just think how much more the blood of Christ will purify our consciences from sinful deeds so that we can worship the living God. For by the power of the eternal Spirit, Christ offered himself to God as a perfect sacrifice for our sins’.⁵

I could see here that Christ, as our great high priest, entered the Holy of Holies (Heaven). But what Christ offered was not the blood of animals which had been sacrificed. He offered His own blood. This blood that our great high priest offered was evidence that the life of an innocent victim had been laid down in sacrifice to make atonement for the sins of the people. ‘The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, “Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!”⁶ John was identifying Jesus as God’s lamb, the One who would be sacrificed for our sins. The death of Christ, the innocent lamb who was sacrificed, was substitutionary.

The penalty for the guilt of the sins of the people has been paid in full. This penalty has not been paid by the sinners themselves, but by Jesus Christ. He took our place by becoming our substitute. He bore our punishment as He suffered and died upon the cross. He offered His own life as a sacrifice for our sins. There is no other sacrifice acceptable to God for the remission of sins. Jesus is now in Heaven, where He mediates on our behalf as our great high priest. Jesus Himself said, “For this is my blood, which confirms the covenant between God and his people. It is poured out as a sacrifice to forgive the sins of many.”⁷

Saint Paul, Saint Peter and Saint John outline in some detail what Christ accomplished for us by the shedding of His blood as He lay His life down in sacrifice on our behalf: ‘And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s condemnation.’⁸ For you know that God paid a ransom to save you from the empty life you inherited from your ancestors. And it was not paid with mere gold or silver, which lose their value. It was the precious blood of Christ, the sinless, spotless Lamb of God.⁹ But if we are living in the light, as God is in the light, then we have fellowship with each other, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, cleanses us from all sin.¹⁰ ...All glory to him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by shedding his blood for us’.¹¹

I could now see the significance of the blood. Now I could understand why the Israelites applied the blood on the night of the Passover. It was very clear that the blood applied was

their only protection from the coming judgement, for God had said, "But the blood on your doorposts will serve as a sign, marking the houses where you are staying. When I see the blood, I will pass over you. This plague of death will not touch you when I strike the land of Egypt. When I see the blood I will pass over you."¹² I could now understand why the high priest never went into the Holy of Holies on the Day of Atonement without blood for, 'according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness'.¹³ It was wonderful to read in the Scriptures of how Christ offered His blood, offered His life, as an atoning sacrifice for my sins. As I pondered these things the words of the hymn, 'How Great Thou Art', came to mind. The words of the following verse of that hymn summed up just how I felt:

*'And when I think that God, His Son not sparing,
Sent Him to die, I scarce can take it in.
That on the cross, my burden gladly bearing,
He bled and died to take away my sin.'*

I found it hard to take in! How could a holy God love a sinner like me? Why would He give His own Son to die in my place as my substitute? Why would He send His only begotten Son to Calvary to bear the punishment for the guilt of my sin? The words of another hymn reminded me that there was no other way by which my sins could be forgiven:

*'There was no other way a God of love could find,
To reconcile the world and save a lost mankind
It took the death of His Own Son upon a tree,
There was no other way but Calvary.'*

ONCE FOR ALL

During my days at Primary school there was a mission box in each classroom. On each mission box there was a picture of an African child and the words, 'There are millions like me in Africa'. The teachers encouraged us to help these little children. We could do this by putting money in the mission box. Money was very scarce. But sometimes we would save a halfpenny from the money we usually spent on sweets, and put it into the box. On such occasions we felt it was of the utmost importance that the teacher and everyone in the classroom witnessed our generosity.

Occasionally a missionary priest visited the school. He informed us of what was happening in the many areas of the world in which his fellow priests were working. We were especially interested to hear of how the priests who worked in Africa were using our offerings to help the little children. He told us that Chapels were being built in many of the remote villages. Sometimes he used a wall map to pinpoint many of the areas in Africa in which masses were being offered each day. When these masses were added to those which were being offered all over the world, it meant that thousands of masses were being offered daily. This continued year after year.

Many years later as I thought about this, I wondered if anyone knew how many times Christ would have to be sacrificed before sin could be forgiven? In school we had been taught that the mass is a re-enactment of Calvary. It was described as follows: 'It is also a sacrifice, the sacrifice of the holy mass, in which, at the time of consecration, the bread and wine are changed into the body and blood of Jesus Christ, and in which He is offered up for us to His eternal Father'. I wondered how many times this sacrifice had been repeated since Christ died on the cross at Calvary? I wondered how many more times it would need to be offered before sin could be forgiven? I knew the only place I could get the answer to these questions was in the Scriptures.

As I read about Christ's sacrifice I noticed that the words, 'one', 'once' and 'once for all', were repeated a number of times. The significance of this became very evident as I read the following verses:

'For God's will was for us to be made holy by the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all time. Under the old covenant, the priest stands and ministers before the altar day after day, offering the same sacrifices again and again, which can never take away sins. But our High Priest offered himself to God as a single sacrifice for sins, good for all time. Then he sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand.¹ For by that one offering he forever made perfect those who are being made holy.² Unlike those other high priests, he does not need to offer sacrifices every day. They did this for their own sins first and then for the sins of the people. But Jesus did this once for all when he offered himself as the sacrifice for the people's sins.³ With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever.⁴ And he did not enter heaven to offer himself again and again, like the high priest here on earth who enters the Most Holy Place year after year with the blood of an animal. If that had been necessary, Christ would have had to die again and again, ever since the world began. But now, once for all time, he has appeared at the end of the age to remove sin by his own death as a sacrifice.⁵ So also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him.⁶ With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever'.⁷

In school I had been taught that each time a priest said mass he was offering Christ as a sacrifice for sin. This meant that Christ was being offered thousands of times each day. I had been told that this was necessary. It was so necessary in fact that, regardless of how many masses I had attended throughout my lifetime, this sacrifice would still have to be offered for me after my death. This would need to be done, I was told, in order to secure my release from Purgatory.

But as far as I was concerned this posed a big problem. How would my family know when enough masses had been said for me? How would the priests know when they had said enough masses for me after my death? How would they know, after hundreds of masses had been offered on my behalf, if I was still in Purgatory? How would they know when I had been freed from Purgatory? How would they know when Christ had been sacrificed and offered enough times for me?

I had to face up to the fact that the teachings of the Roman Catholic Church could give me no assurance that my sins had been forgiven or that I would go to Heaven when I died. This was borne out by the fact that it was deemed necessary that masses be offered for me after my death. In other words Christ would have to be offered again and again as a sacrifice for my sins. I could see that this was completely contrary to what I read in God's Word: 'So also Christ was offered once for all time as a sacrifice to take away the sins of many people. He will come again, not to deal with our sins, but to bring salvation to all who are eagerly waiting for him'.⁸

If we are to believe the Bible then Christ's 'once for all' sacrifice was sufficient and cannot be repeated. Jesus cannot die again. God's Word says that Christ lives forever, never to die again. He cannot be sacrificed again. No priest can offer Jesus as a sacrifice. Christ, as our great high priest, offered Himself as a sacrifice for sin 'once for all'. As He hung upon the cross Jesus cried out, "It is finished!" Then he bowed his head and gave up his spirit'.⁹ All sacrifices were finished. The work of Atonement had been completed. 'Then he says, "I will never again remember their sins and lawless deeds." And when sins have been forgiven, there is no need to offer any more sacrifices'.¹⁰ So it became very clear to me as I read the Scriptures that Christ had not instituted another sacrificial system, namely the mass. But He had, through His 'once for all' sacrifice at Calvary abolished and rendered unnecessary any further sacrifice.

In the light of what God said in His Word I knew I had a decision to make. It would be foolish to continue depending upon the sacrifice of the mass, which is offered thousands of times each day, for if the mass were effective it would not need to be repeated at all. Or on the other hand I could put my faith in Christ's 'once for all sacrifice'. The Scriptures teach that 'With his own blood—not the blood of goats and calves—he entered the Most Holy Place once for all time and secured our redemption forever'.¹¹

Faith in Christ guaranteed my salvation. This guarantee was not based upon anything the Church could do for my soul. Nor was it dependent upon what I could do to earn or merit salvation. But this guarantee was based upon what Christ had done on my behalf, through His 'once for all' sacrifice. He had obtained eternal redemption for me. This was the assurance of salvation for which I had been searching.

PURGATORY

As a boy I longed to be a member of our local gang. Each area in our town had its own gang. Boys aged between ten and thirteen were eligible for membership. We all had our own territory and several brave boys lived to regret invading it. The gangs fought many long battles. Homemade swords, tomahawks, bows and arrows and swords were our favourite weapons. Hurleys were used when things got very serious. The battles usually took place on Saturdays. But the interrogations took place on Monday mornings as our teachers inspected the battle-scars. "I fell off the bike, sir!" "I tripped over the dog, sir!" "I slipped on a banana skin, sir!" These were just some of the excuses our teachers had to listen to. We were all too tough to admit that the enemy had wounded us.

We all liked to think we were fearless warriors. But on the first Friday of each month we were all very subdued. This was the day we had to walk from the school to the Chapel to have our confessions heard. We did not mind going to confession, but even the most fearless of the warriors dreaded the possibility of having to visit Box Number 6.

There were six double confession boxes in the Chapel. The local priests used five of these boxes. We made every effort to ensure that during our monthly visit we confessed to our favourite priest. This was the man who did not give you too many prayers to say for your penance. But Box Number 6 was different from the others. It was known as the Bishop's Box. If the sins you confessed to the priest were deemed to be serious and he felt he could not grant absolution, he then directed you to the Bishop. The sins would then have to be confessed to him. Hopefully, he would administer absolution.

The fearless warriors dreaded two things. We dreaded being seen waiting outside Box Number 6. Everyone knew that if you had to visit this confession box you were a serious sinner. So we dreaded the possibility of any of our neighbours seeing us there, for we feared they might tell our parents. We also dreaded the possibility that the Bishop may think our sin to be so serious that he would not grant us absolution. We believed that if this happened we would remain in a state of mortal sin. We had been taught that if we died in a state of mortal sin we would go directly to Hell. Consequently one of the prayers before confession was a plea to the Blessed Virgin to ensure full remission for our sins. The words of this prayer are as follows: 'O most gracious Virgin Mary, beloved Mother of Jesus Christ my Redeemer, intercede for me with Him. Obtain for me the full remission of my sins and perfect amendment of life to the salvation of my soul, and the glory of His name'.

We were not too worried about the venial sins because, according to what we had been taught, they were not as serious as the mortal sins. According to the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church, 'We are obliged to confess all mortal sins and therefore, as far as we can remember, the number of times we have committed them; ... We are not obliged to confess venial sins.' † The final destination of your soul, we were taught, depended upon whether you died in a state of mortal or venial sin. To die in a state of mortal sin meant the soul was destined for Hell. To die in a state of venial sin meant the soul would eventually go to Heaven, but not before it spent some time in Purgatory. Even though the guilt of our sin may be forgiven the temporal punishment for it still remained. The temporal punishment that had not been cancelled by indulgences or atoned for by acts of penance would be paid for in Purgatory.

We were told that Purgatory is a place of intense suffering. According to Thomas Aquinas, Purgatory's Fire is hotter than the fires of Hell. As a result of the sufferings endured in Purgatory the soul would eventually be purified and made fit for Heaven. In 1439 the Council

of Florence proclaimed Purgatory to be Church Dogma. Our greatest fear therefore was that we might die in a state of mortal sin. The thoughts of dying in a state of venial sin and going to Purgatory did not bother us too much. Even though we had been told the suffering in the 'fire of purgation' would be severe we believed that some day it would end and we would then go to Heaven. So even if a visit to Box Number 6 was necessary to obtain absolution we reckoned it was worth it.

We had been taught that the duration of our stay in Purgatory could be shortened. If our families and friends prayed for us, and if the priests said masses for us, a certain amount of time would be deducted from our sentence. Each year, in the month of November, the priests sent out a list to each home in their parish. People wrote the names of their deceased relatives on the list and then returned it to the priest. He then said masses for the repose of the souls of those mentioned on the list. I remember praying for all of my deceased relatives and friends, especially on All Souls' Day. I firmly believed that my prayers would help shorten their stay in Purgatory.

But many years later, as I examined the Scriptures, I could not find even one reference to a place called Purgatory. Heaven and Hell were dealt with in great detail in the Bible but there was no mention of Purgatory. But if there was no Purgatory, then where could sin be purged? This question was answered as I read the following portions of God's Word: 'The Son radiates God's own glory and expresses the very character of God, and he sustains everything by the mighty power of his command. When he had cleansed us from our sins, he sat down in the place of honor at the right hand of the majestic God in heaven.¹ In fact, according to the law of Moses, nearly everything was purified with blood. For without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness'.² These verses make it clear that when He (Christ) had, by Himself, purged our sins, He ascended to Heaven to His Father's side. The Scriptures make it very clear that a Person (Christ) purged our sins. There is no mention of sin being dealt with in Purgatory.

Christ purged our sins before He ascended to Heaven. This means that sin was purged in the past, and not in the future. The location at which the purging of sin took place is identified in the Scriptures. Christ purged our sins at Calvary. Sin is not purged at any other location. Our sin was purged at the cross. The means employed in the purging of sin is also made very clear: 'Yet it was our weaknesses he carried; it was our sorrows that weighed him down. And we thought his troubles were a punishment from God, a punishment for his own sins! But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was whipped so we could be healed. All of us, like sheep, have strayed away. We have left God's paths to follow our own. Yet the LORD laid on him the sins of us all'.³ Jesus Christ purged our sins by the shedding of His blood. As He hung upon the cross, pouring out His life, He bore the punishment for the guilt of our sin. What we would have suffered in Hell Christ suffered on the cross, as our substitute. The Scriptures clearly teach that... 'Without the shedding of blood, there is no forgiveness'.⁴ There is no other means by which sin can be purged.

I could now see a great difference between what I had been taught and what God said in His Word.

➤ I had believed my sin would be purged in the future, after I died.
But God's Word says my sin was purged in the past.

➤ I had been told the 'fire of purgation' would purge my sin.
But God's Word says that Christ purged my sin.

➤ I had been taught that my sin would be purged in a place called Purgatory.
But God's Word says my sin was purged at a place called Calvary.

➤ I had believed that I would have to suffer for my sins in Purgatory.
But God's Word says that Christ suffered for my sins, as my substitute: 'But he was pierced for our rebellion, crushed for our sins. He was beaten so we could be whole. He was

whipped so we could be healed. He was wounded for our [my] transgressions; he was bruised for our [my] iniquities; the chastisement of our [my] peace was upon Him'.⁵

Yes, my sin had to be purged. But it was purged! It was purged by Jesus Christ, when He died upon the cross at Calvary as my substitute.

APPARITIONS

Two of my mother's favourite holy pictures depicted apparitions or appearances of the Blessed Virgin. According to Roman Catholic tradition Mary has appeared in many different locations throughout the world. The most famous apparitions reportedly happened at Fatima, Lourdes, Garabandal and in Knock, Co. Mayo. One of the pictures in our home depicted Mary appearing at Fatima to three children. These apparitions reportedly took place between May and October 1917. According to Lucia, one of the visionaries, the Blessed Virgin, at each visitation, requested the recitation of the Rosary. "Continue to pray the Rosary every day," she said. When Mary finally revealed her identity to the children during the October apparition she said, "I am the Lady of the Rosary." The children said that Mary gave to them three secrets which were to be revealed separately, at different times. These became known as 'The Three Secrets of Fatima'. There was much speculation as to what the three secrets might be and many people anxiously awaited their publication.

A few years after the apparitions two of the children died. The surviving visionary, Lucia, entered a convent. She later testified that the Blessed Virgin appeared to her in the convent. According to Lucia, the child Jesus accompanied Mary on this occasion. I had always been interested in these reported apparitions. I was particularly interested in the messages associated with them. I was really impressed by the fact that the Blessed Virgin and her young Son left Heaven on several occasions. They then visited people who lived in various parts of the world, bringing to them specific messages and instructions. I decided to examine the Scriptures with a view to discovering what God said in His Word concerning these apparitions of the Blessed Virgin and her child.

The first thing I noticed in the Bible on this subject was the fact that the 'appearances' of the Lord Jesus Christ were either the fulfilment of prophecies or the fulfilment of promises made by Jesus Himself. I wanted to discover if it had been prophesied or promised in the Bible that the Blessed Virgin and her young Son would appear in a convent in Fatima. I was very interested in discovering what the Scriptures had to say about Jesus and His mother leaving Heaven and manifesting themselves in different locations.

According to the Scriptures, the first appearance of Jesus as a child was when He was born to the Blessed Virgin Mary in a stable in Bethlehem. This was the fulfilment of many prophecies which are recorded in the Old Testament. Mary saw Him grow from a child to a man and when He was about thirty years of age He began His ministry. Throughout His ministry He spoke of two and only two specific times when He would return after His death and manifest Himself by appearing publicly. On both of these occasions He would appear as the man Christ Jesus. He never said He would manifest Himself as a child.

The first of Christ's promised appearances occurred after His resurrection when He appeared to His disciples over a period of forty days. During this time He appeared as the man Christ Jesus in His resurrected body. On no occasion did He appear as a child. One of Christ's appearances at this time is described as follows: 'Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!"¹ When Jesus appeared after His death, therefore, it was as the man Christ Jesus and not as a child. Forty days after His resurrection Jesus ascended into Heaven in His resurrected, glorified body, as the man Christ Jesus.

I always believed that Jesus had appeared as a child in many different locations around the world. I believed that on these occasions He had come directly from Heaven. However, as I

read God's Word I was left in no doubt concerning the fact that Jesus is in Heaven as a man and not as a child. The Scriptures make it clear that Jesus ascended to Heaven as a man. 'After saying this, he was taken up into a cloud while they were watching, and they could no longer see him. As they strained to see him rising into heaven, two white-robed men suddenly stood among them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"² The apostles watched as the man Christ Jesus ascended into Heaven. The man Christ Jesus, in His resurrected body, with the nail prints in His hands, would come back in the same way. He would not come back in another way. He would not, for example, come back in a different body. He would not come back in a child's body. He ascended as a man. He would come back as a man, the same Jesus.

In school we had been told that Saint Stephen was the first Christian Martyr. So I was very interested to see Stephen's words recorded in the Bible. The following are some of the very words he spoke as he was being stoned to death: "Name one prophet your ancestors didn't persecute! They even killed the ones who predicted the coming of the Righteous One—the Messiah whom you betrayed and murdered."³ The Jewish leaders were infuriated by Stephen's accusation, and they shook their fists at him in rage. But Stephen, full of the Holy Spirit, gazed steadily into heaven and saw the glory of God, and he saw Jesus standing in the place of honor at God's right hand. And he told them, "Look, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing in the place of honor at God's right hand!"⁴ Stephen therefore saw the man Christ Jesus, the One who had been crucified. He saw the One who had risen from the dead and ascended to His Father in Heaven. Stephen saw Jesus the man, and not Jesus the child.

One of those who witnessed Stephen's death was a man named Saul. He was a persecutor of the followers of Jesus, but some time later he was converted and became the apostle Paul. He wrote in one of his Epistles: 'For, there is one God and one Mediator who can reconcile God and humanity—the man Christ Jesus'.⁵ It was so crystal clear in the Scriptures that the only mediator in Heaven is the Man Christ Jesus. As I continued to read God's Word I noticed that the man Christ Jesus is described as our great high priest: 'So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe.⁶ Here is the main point: We have a High Priest who sat down in the place of honor beside the throne of the majestic God in heaven'.⁷

God's Word makes it very clear that the high priest in Heaven is not a child, but a man. The man Christ Jesus is our great high priest. Jesus grew from childhood to manhood, fulfilled His ministry and died upon the cross. He was buried but rose again and ascended to Heaven. Today He is at His Father's right hand as our great high priest, mediator and advocate. Jesus is no longer a child. The man Christ Jesus is King of kings and Lord of lords.

UNDER THE APPEARANCE

A prized possession in most of our neighbours' houses was a little plastic bottle with a blue cap on it. There was an image of the Blessed Virgin engraved on it. This special bottle contained the famous Lourdes Water. This water, reputed to have miraculous healing powers, was brought back home by most of the pilgrims who visited Lourdes, the scene of one of the reported apparitions of Mary.

Pilgrimages to Lourdes were organised each year. The sick and disabled were encouraged to visit the famous grotto and pray for healing. Many of those who could not make the journey relied, during times of illness, upon the contents of the little bottle of Lourdes water. Some people sipped the water. Others applied it to afflicted parts of the body, making the sign of the cross as they did so. Pilgrimages to Fatima were also organised, and many of our friends visited the convent in which the Blessed Virgin and her young Son are said to have appeared.

I had read in the Scriptures that the man Christ Jesus had appeared to His disciples after His resurrection. He then ascended into Heaven to sit at His Father's right hand. I now set out to

see what God's Word said concerning the fact that Christ promised He would come back again. According to the Scriptures the man Christ Jesus will remain in Heaven until His Second Coming. His return is foretold in the following verses: 'Jesus replied, "You have said it. And in the future you will see the Son of Man seated in the place of power at God's right hand and coming on the clouds of heaven."¹ For as the lightning flashes in the east and shines to the west, so it will be when the Son of Man comes."²

The purpose of Christ's Second Coming is also very clearly outlined: "But when the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit upon his glorious throne. All the nations will be gathered in his presence, and he will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. He will place the sheep at his right hand and the goats at his left. "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father, inherit the Kingdom prepared for you from the creation of the world."³ "Then the King will turn to those on the left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons."⁴

Jesus Himself described the manner of His Second Coming: "And then at last, the sign that the Son of Man is coming will appear in the heavens, and there will be deep mourning among all the peoples of the earth. And they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great."⁵ We also read that when Jesus ascended to Heaven the disciples watched as a cloud hid Him from their sight. Two angels appeared to them. "Men of Galilee," they said, "why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but someday he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!"⁶

I could see here that when Jesus returns it would be on the clouds of Heaven. The angels said He would come back in the same way. There was no prophecy, promise or statement in the Scriptures indicating that Jesus would come back in some other way. Neither was there any suggestion that He would return to earth again before His Second Coming. There was no indication in the Word of God that He would return as a child, or under the appearance of something else. According to the Scriptures the man Christ Jesus is at His Father's right hand in Heaven: 'When the Lord Jesus had finished talking with them, he was taken up into heaven and sat down in the place of honor at God's right hand'.⁷ Indeed, Jesus will remain in Heaven as our great high priest, mediator and advocate until His Second Coming. It is not possible for the man Christ Jesus, in His resurrected body, to be in two places at the same time. Because He is physically in Heaven, the man Christ Jesus cannot be on earth at the same time.

I had been taught that, at the consecration of the mass, '*The angels gather round with awe and reverence; the priest prays in a low tone...our Lord Jesus Christ will come down upon the altar*'. ‡ This means that at thousands of masses, celebrated at the same time in several locations around the world, the man Christ Jesus comes down physically onto the altar. I could find nothing in God's Word to indicate that the Lord Jesus Christ came down from Heaven under the appearance of bread and wine. But I distinctly remembered what we had been taught concerning the mass: '*The Holy Eucharist, which is really and truly and substantially the Body and Blood, and the Soul and Divinity, of Jesus Christ, Under the Appearance of bread and wine...and in which He is Really Present to be adored upon the altar; It is also a sacrifice...the Bread and wine are changed into the Body and Blood of Jesus Christ*'. ‡

There was a great contradiction here between the teaching of the Roman Catholic Church and what God said in His Word. Nowhere in God's Word is it stated that Jesus would return under the appearance of something else.

At the Last Supper, shortly before His crucifixion, Jesus gave His disciples bread and wine. The bread was to remind them of His body, which would be crucified. The wine was to remind them of His blood, which would be shed as He suffered and died to pay the penalty for the guilt of our sins. Jesus would soon be leaving them. As He handed them the bread He said, "This is my body, which is given for you. Do this to remember me." In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often

as you drink it.”⁸ Jesus was reminding His disciples that He would not always be physically present with them. But they were to continue to remember Him, especially whenever they partook of the bread and wine. Concerning the Lord’s Supper, the Apostle Paul wrote, ‘For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again’.⁹

These New Testament believers knew the Lord wanted His followers to continue observing this remembrance supper until He came back. Then the Lord’s Supper would no longer need to be observed for He Himself would be present physically with them. Whenever they partook of the Lord’s Supper they were never of the opinion that Christ was physically present with them, under the appearance of bread and wine. His own disciples believed what the angels told them as they watched the man Christ Jesus ascend to Heaven. “Men of Galilee,” they said, “why are you standing here staring into heaven? Jesus has been taken from you into heaven, but some day he will return from heaven in the same way you saw him go!”¹⁰ Christ’s disciples did not believe He would come back in any other way or under the appearance of anything else. The bread and wine were reminders of the Lord’s death and this remembrance supper was to be observed until He came back.

I could now see clearly in the Scriptures that:

- The man Christ Jesus will come back again. Bible scholars refer to His return as His ‘Second Coming’.
- Since His ascension the man Christ Jesus has been at His Father’s right hand in Heaven. Our great high priest, mediator and advocate will remain in Heaven until His Second Coming.
- Since He ascended to Heaven He does not come down on the altar at mass. His body, blood, soul and divinity have not come down from Heaven to be present on the altar under the appearance of bread and wine.
- He does not leave Heaven to appear in several different locations as a child.

These truths left me in no doubt at all that the man-made laws and traditions I had been taught were not in accordance with the inspired Word of God. In fact they were a complete contradiction to what the Scriptures teach. Once again I was confronted with a decision I knew I had to make.

DOUBTING THOMAS

“Memorise them! Learn them off by heart!” our teacher insisted. He was referring to the names of the twelve Apostles. As young schoolboys we very often found it difficult to remember the names of all the Apostles, but we had no problem remembering Thomas. We referred to him as ‘Doubting Thomas’ because of his doubts concerning the resurrection of Jesus.

Many years later I read in the Bible the actual account of how Thomas doubted the fact that the Lord had risen from the dead. After His resurrection Jesus appeared to His disciples on a number of occasions. The Apostle John reminds us of a particular occasion on which Thomas was not present with the other disciples when the Lord appeared. ‘They told him, “We have seen the Lord!” But he replied, “I won’t believe it unless I see the nail wounds in his hands, put my fingers into them, and place my hand into the wound in his side.”’¹

Thomas certainly had doubts! I wondered if perhaps he feared that what had appeared to the disciples might be a counterfeit, deceiving spirit, which claimed to be Jesus. He needed to be certain that it really was the Lord. Some years later the Apostle Paul warned Christ’s followers of the reality of deceiving spirits. He reminded them that ‘Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light’.² Thomas needed to be sure the apparition was genuine. Could it really be Jesus, the one who had been crucified, died and was buried?

Any doubts Thomas may have had soon disappeared. We read in the Scriptures: 'Eight days later the disciples were together again, and this time Thomas was with them. The doors were locked; but suddenly, as before, Jesus was standing among them. "Peace be with you," he said. Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here, and look at my hands. Put your hand into the wound in my side. Don't be faithless any longer. Believe!" "My Lord and my God!" Thomas exclaimed'.³ There was no longer any room for doubt. Thomas recognised the man Christ Jesus, in His resurrected body, with the nail prints in His hands. However, I wondered how Thomas would have reacted if he had seen the apparition of a child which claimed to be Jesus. I was convinced he would have recognised it to be a counterfeit. He would have recognised it to be an impostor, and would never have acknowledged the apparition as 'my Lord and my God'.

Many people, like Lucia, claim to have seen an apparition of Jesus as a child. Whatever or whoever may be appearing to them, it is certainly not Jesus. The resurrected physical body of Jesus is that of a man. The Bible teaches that Jesus was never in Heaven as a child. He is presently in Heaven as the man Christ Jesus. In the future the man Christ Jesus will return and take those whom He has redeemed to be with Him. People who claim that Jesus left Heaven and appeared as a child at places like Fatima are mistaken.

The vital importance of the presence of the man Christ Jesus in Heaven became increasingly clear to me as I read God's Word. God's plan of redemption required that the merits of the sinless life and substitutionary death of the man Christ Jesus be put to the account of the sinner if he was ever to be saved. Sin could not be forgiven on the basis of a child standing in the sinner's place, for the child would not have fulfilled all the requirements of the Law concerning atonement for sin. The man Christ Jesus, after living a sinless life, died a vicarious death on the cross as our substitute. He was buried but rose again on the third day. He ascended to Heaven where He is now at His Father's right hand as our great high priest, mediator and advocate. He will remain there, interceding for us at the Throne of grace, until His Second Coming. Then the man Christ Jesus will return.

Shortly before leaving His disciples Jesus said to them, "There is more than enough room in my Father's home. If this were not so, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you? When everything is ready, I will come and get you, so that you will always be with me where I am."⁴ These words were not just for those present with Him at that time. This message was for all who would repent of their sins and put their faith in Jesus, trusting Him as their sin-bearer, substitute and Saviour.

I was greatly encouraged to read of the wonderful plan God has for the salvation of sinners.

MARY'S MESSAGES

During our schooldays we were told that the Blessed Virgin and her young Son occasionally left Heaven and visited various countries. Sometimes the Blessed Virgin brought the child with her but on several occasions she appeared alone. If they appeared together both usually spoke but sometimes the child remained silent and only Mary spoke. We were also overjoyed to learn that the Blessed Virgin had appeared in Ireland. It was reported that she had appeared at Knock, in County Mayo, on 21 August 1879. By appearing in Ireland Mary had indicated her intention of adopting the Irish people as her own children. We could now call her our Mother. As our Mother she would care for our physical and spiritual welfare. Mary also became the Queen of Ireland and we were very glad to be her loyal subjects.

Mary was also Queen of every country in which she had appeared but our teachers told us that Mary had an even greater honour than this. They informed us that during a special coronation ceremony Jesus crowned Mary Queen of Heaven where she now reigns with her Son. Consequently we were taught to pray to the Queen of Heaven. She would, we were told, take our requests to her Son and influence Him on our behalf. The fact that 'Jesus would never refuse His own Mother' was a real incentive to us to bring our requests to Mary. We were encouraged to say the following prayer: *'Remember, O most loving Virgin Mary, that it is a thing unheard of, that anyone who ever had recourse to thy protection, implored thy*

help, or sought thy intercession, was left forsaken. Filled therefore with confidence in thy goodness I fly to thee, O Mother, Virgin of virgins. To thee I come, before thee I stand, a sorrowful sinner. Despise not my words, O Mother of the Word, but graciously hear and grant my prayer. We were also told that Mary would pray for us. The 'Hail Mary' was the first prayer we were taught. Part of this prayer is: *'Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death'*. It gave us great confidence to know that the Blessed Virgin, Queen of Heaven, was praying for us now and would also be praying for us at the hour of our death!

Having grown up with a great respect for the Blessed Virgin I felt it would be good to examine, in the light of God's Word, the reported happenings at the apparitions. To my surprise I could not find any indication in the Scriptures that Mary would appear after her death. I read in the Bible that at the Second Coming of Christ all who have been redeemed by Him and are with Him in Heaven will return with Him: *'Enoch, who lived in the seventh generation after Adam, prophesied about these people. He said, "Listen! The Lord is coming with countless thousands of his holy ones.'*¹ Until then the souls of all, including Mary, who have died trusting Christ as Saviour will remain in Heaven.

I was also very interested in the messages associated with the apparitions. As far as I was concerned these messages, if they were from Heaven, should correspond exactly with what God had revealed in His Word. The children at Fatima said the Blessed Virgin gave them the following message: *'If people say the Rosary, Russia will be converted'*. However, the Scriptures make it clear that if the people of Russia or any other country are to be converted they must repent of their sins and believe the Gospel. They must put their faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and depend upon Him for their salvation. Jesus Himself preached this very message: *"The time promised by God has come at last!"* he announced. *"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"*² Jesus replied, *"I tell you the truth, unless you are born again you cannot see the Kingdom of God...So don't be surprised when I say, 'You must be born again.'*³ Then he said, *"I tell you the truth, unless you turn from your sins and become like little children, you will never get into the Kingdom of Heaven."*⁴ He said that there is only ONE way of salvation and He is the way. *'Jesus told him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one can come to the Father except through me."*⁵

Mary, the mother of the man Christ Jesus, knew herself that there was only one way of Salvation. The angel had said to her husband Joseph, concerning the birth of Jesus, *"And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus for he will save his people from their sins."*⁶ Would Mary then try to lure people away from Jesus and tell them to pray to her? Would the woman who was especially chosen by God to give birth to His Son dishonour Jesus in this way? Would the Blessed Virgin, who wept as her Son died upon the cross, deny what Jesus had said? Would the loving mother of the man Christ Jesus deny that He is the ONLY sinless One, the ONLY Saviour, the ONLY mediator between God and men, the ONLY Advocate, the ONLY One who, as God incarnate, is to be worshipped and the ONLY One to whom sinners could turn? No, Mary would never do that!

Yet, as I examined the various messages given at the reported apparitions it seemed this was what was being done. This was very obvious as I considered a claim made at one of apparitions and attributed to Mary. She is reported to have said, *"I am the Immaculate Conception."* In other words she was saying she had been born sinless. She was stating that she had been born without the stain of original sin. She was saying that she had been born without the sinful nature inherited from Adam as a result of the Fall. However, the Scriptures clearly state that Christ was the ONLY One who was born without sin and He was the ONLY One who lived a sinless life. Mary never claimed to be sinless. In her own words she said she rejoiced in the fact that God was her Saviour. *'Mary responded, "Oh, how my soul praises the Lord. How my spirit rejoices in God my Savior!"*⁷ She rejoiced in the knowledge that God had saved her from the penalty due to her sin. Mary's sin was purged at the cross as Jesus died for the sins of all who, like Mary, would trust Him as Saviour.

We can therefore see a great contradiction between the statements made at the apparitions and Mary's words as recorded in Scripture. The messages associated with the apparitions and attributed to the Blessed Virgin did her a terrible injustice. In fact they totally distorted the

character of Mary. She is portrayed in the Scriptures as the loving, obedient, trusting 'handmaid of the Lord'. She was especially chosen by God not only to give birth to His Son, but also to rear Him. She was totally devoted to Jesus. Mary, perhaps more than anyone else, fully realised that the One she loved and cared for from the manger to the cross was the only means by which sinners could be saved.

I had believed in these apparitions for many years. I also believed the messages reportedly given at the apparitions. Yet I knew that even the Roman Catholic Church had never fully accepted them as being authentic. More importantly, I now knew that both the apparitions and their messages contradicted what God said in His Word. I knew I had a decision to make.

NO LONGER SEARCHING

I could hardly believe what I saw! My grandfather had just returned from town and was showing my grandmother a new pair of boots he had just bought. To a ten year old child this was amazing, for I believed grandfather was so old he would not live long enough to wear out these new boots. I was very surprised he did not realise this. However, I am sure he was hoping he would live long enough to wear out a few more pairs. Many years later, when grandfather died, I was hoping he had gone to Heaven. I was also hoping I would meet him there some day.

For many years I had been hoping I would go to Heaven when I died. At funerals I saw a lot of heart broken people. All of them were hoping that the soul of their loved one who was being buried had gone to Heaven. At Roman Catholic funerals the family, friends and the priest were all hoping the dear departed one's soul was with the Lord. At Protestant funerals the minister and all the mourners were hoping the deceased person's soul was in Heaven. All of them were hoping but none of them actually knew.

I had been a devout Roman Catholic all my life. I had attended mass and the sacraments regularly. I did my best to be a good person. But, having done all that, I was still only hoping that I would go to Heaven when I died. I was searching for the assurance of eternal life. The friend who shared the gospel with me told me that he knew for certain that his sins had been forgiven. He said he had the assurance of salvation and knew that one day he would be in Heaven. He assured me this certainty was based upon what God said in His Word.

As I read the Scriptures I could see what he meant. The apostle Paul wrote: '[God saved you by his grace when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God. Salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done, so none of us can boast about it.](#)¹ [For the grace of God has been revealed, bringing salvation to all people.](#)² [He saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit.](#)³ I was really challenged when I read in the Scriptures that '[salvation is not a reward for the good things we have done](#)'. The Bible made it clear that salvation could not be earned or merited. I could not be saved as a result of my own good works or anything the Church might do on my behalf.

I read also about '[The grace of God that brings salvation](#)'. This clearly teaches that salvation is by grace. The grace of God is His unmerited favour to the sinner. It means that God reaches down to helpless sinners, revealing to them the fact that He loves them so much that He sent Jesus, His only begotten Son, to the cross on their behalf. God's grace was demonstrated as Christ became the sinner's substitute, paying the penalty for sin that the sinner should have paid. God's unmerited favour was manifested as Jesus suffered Hell on the cross so that the sinner need not go to Hell.

God, in His Word, clearly explains the outworking of His grace to a sinner like me. He puts all the guilt of my sin to Christ's account. He imputes (puts to my account) Christ's righteousness (all the merits of His sinless life and vicarious death as our substitute on the cross). As a result I would actually be declared righteous by God. This is God's grace. This is

God's unmerited favour to a sinner. The Scriptures make it clear that that a sinner is saved by grace. I looked up the meaning of the word 'saved'. It means the sinner will be delivered, or rescued from the penalty for sin, which is eternity in Hell. The sinner can be saved from this penalty only because of the fact that Christ, as the sinner's substitute, paid in full the penalty for sin when He died upon the cross at Calvary. Saint Paul, in his Epistle to the Ephesians, writes: 'God saved you by his grace when you believed (when you put your faith in Christ, when you put your trust in Him, when you depended upon Him for your salvation).

Here at last was the great assurance of eternal life for which I had been searching! In Saint John's Epistle I read the following words: 'And this is what God has testified: He has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have God's Son does not have life. I have written this to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know you have eternal life'.⁴ 'So that you may know!' What amazing words! For many years I had been hoping. But now I could see in God's Word that it is possible to know your sins are forgiven. It is possible to know you have eternal life, and to know you will go to Heaven when you die.

But who are these things written to, I wondered? The verse makes it clear that these things are addressed to 'you who believe in the name of the Son of God'. These things are written to you who believe what God has said concerning His Son. God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. By believing in, by trusting in and by depending upon Jesus Christ and His atoning work on our behalf we can know we have eternal life.

SAFELY HOME

Jesus left us in no doubt concerning the way of salvation. "The time promised by God has come at last!" he announced. "The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!"¹ I acknowledged the fact that I was a sinner and that I deserved to go to Hell. I repented of my sins. This meant there was deep sorrow for my sin, which had caused Christ to go to the cross. But it was more than that. There was also a determination to turn my back on the old sinful way of life. I was determined to change direction. I now knew that Christ had suffered and died as my substitute and had paid in full the penalty for the guilt of my sins.

I abandoned my dependence upon religion, tradition and good works. I put my faith in Jesus Christ believing that, as a result of the merits of His sinless life and His death upon the cross being put to my account, I would be saved. I humbly and sincerely asked God to forgive me and to save me. And He did! He has given to me the great assurance of eternal life.

I am 'NO LONGER SEARCHING!

INVITATION

Dear Friend,

Perhaps you have been trying to earn or merit salvation by doing your best. Maybe you have been depending upon the fact that you are a member of a particular Church. But today you are still searching for the assurance of eternal life. Instead of looking to your own good works or looking to religion to save you, look to the Lord, who said, "Let all the world look to me for salvation! For I am God; there is no other."¹

Do not delay! "Come now, let's settle this," says the LORD. "Though your sins are like scarlet, I will make them as white as snow. Though they are red like crimson, I will make them as white as wool."² Jesus said, "Look! I stand at the door and knock. If you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in, and we will share a meal together as friends."³

Could it be that the Saviour is knocking on the door of your heart, the door of your life, right now? Acknowledging the fact that you are a sinner, turn to the Lord in sincere repentance.

Ask Him to forgive you and trust Him to save you. Through faith in Jesus Christ you can receive the assurance of sins forgiven and the guarantee of a home in Heaven.

For “Everyone who calls on the name of the LORD will be saved.”⁴

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SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

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Three Questions

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9: Hebrews 7:26 10: Hebrews 8:1 11: Hebrews 9:11 12: Hebrews 10:21

Relics and Mediators

1: Hebrews 7:23 2: 1Timothy 2:5 3: Hebrews 7:24-25
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The Blood

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Apparitions

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Under The Appearance

1: Matthew 26: 64 2: Matthew 24:27 3: Matthew 25:31-34
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Mary's Messages

1: Jude 14 **2:** Mark 1:15 **3:** John 3: 3, 7 **4:** Matthew 18: 3

5: John 14: 6 **6:** Matthew 1:21 **7:** Luke 1:46-47

No Longer Searching

1: Ephesians 2:8-9 **2:** Titus 2:11 **3:** Titus 3:5 **4:** 1John 5:11-13

Safely Home

1: Mark 1:15

Invitation

1: Isaiah 45:22 **2:** Isaiah 1:18 **3:** Revelation 3:20 **4:** Romans 10:13

Quotations marked thus † are from: *A Simple Prayer Book*, © 1957
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The Early Days

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Alone

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NO LONGER SEARCHING

All Scripture references are numbered and can be checked in the Scripture References Section.